

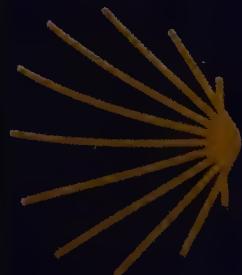
THE Christian CENTURY

Practically Living Faithfully.



HERE I WALK

On the road with Luther



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ROB BELL

AUTHOR OF **VELVET ELVIS**

A BOOK ABOUT **HEAVEN**,

HELL, AND THE FATE OF EVERY

PERSON WHO EVER LIVED

LOVE WINS



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A historic ban

AFTER WEEKS OF deliberation, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn on Ash Wednesday signed a bill abolishing the death penalty in Illinois. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, author Scott Turow, Sister Helen Prejean (author of *Dead Man Walking*) and many others urged Quinn to sign the bill, while State Attorney General Lisa Madigan and many prosecuting attorneys urged him to veto it. I added my name to a list of Chicagoans opposed to the death penalty.

Since 2000, Illinois has had a moratorium on the death penalty. Earlier, a group of Northwestern journalism students had started to investigate the death penalty and discovered that out of 25 cases since 1977, juries and judges had convicted and sentenced to death 13 people who were later found to be innocent; in other words, Illinois very nearly executed 13 innocent people. At that point then governor George Ryan declared: "When I was a pharmacist, I couldn't have stayed in business if I got it right only 50 percent of the time." In 2003 Ryan took 167 people off of death row.

A Roman Catholic, Quinn listened to Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, consulted the Bible and remembered the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's words: "In a complex, sophisticated democracy like ours, means other than the death penalty are available and can be used to protect society."

Everyone agrees that executing innocent people is unacceptable. But what about the guilty, the confessed, the remorseless, the perhaps proud killer? I learned a lot about this issue from a

member of my congregation, Jeanne Bishop. Jeanne is a public defender and vocal opponent of the death penalty. When she talks about capital punishment you listen. In 1990 her 25-year-old sister Nancy, who was three months pregnant, and Nancy's husband were murdered in their suburban home. A young man was waiting for them. He shot Richard first, fired at Nancy's swollen belly, then left her to bleed to death. He was arrested six months later. He has shown no remorse.

After the murders, Jeanne continued to advocate for abolition of the death penalty. She wrote an essay about her experience and convictions in *Religion and the Death Penalty: A Call for Reckoning*. With lawyerly logic she recites the arguments for capital punishment and refutes them point by point. She is particularly eloquent as she discusses the notion that executing the murderer will bring closure to the victim's loved ones. "Killing the killer doesn't close anything, certainly not my grief," Jeanne wrote. She finds the saying "an eye for an eye" insulting. "Imagine, if all [that] my sister's killer could give me in return for my loved one's lives were his life. His death could never begin to pay for theirs."

Then Jeanne says, "I forgive Nancy's killer . . . not because he has an excuse—he has none whatsoever. I forgive not because he asked for it; he has not. I do not forgive for him. Rather I forgive for the One who asked me to and taught me to."

What a powerful Lenten lesson for the year when the death penalty was abolished in Illinois.

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On the cover: Walking in Tuscany where the Via Francigena and the Camino de Santiago follow the same route in opposite directions. Photo © Andrew Wilson. All rights reserved.

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Speaking categorically

In replying to a reader's letter (Feb. 22) about the editorial on the Southern Poverty Law Center's recent report on hate speech (Jan. 11), the CENTURY editors write, "Being gay, like being black or being a woman, is immutable."

I object to the premise that sexual preference is fixed and static. "Gay" is not an ontological category. Whether or not it is "immutable" is open to debate by reasonable people. Whether you are a traditionalist reading the ancient and medieval Christian ascetics or a contemporary progressive LGBT theorist reading Foucault, many intelligent people of good will would argue that sex and sexual preferences are plastic.

Traditionalists will find that encouraging, since it means that repentance and change are possible, even if difficult and often mysterious. Progressives might also find that encouraging, since it means that some degree of choice and self-liberation are possible. For both traditionalists and progressives, sexuality's malleability and contingency are also causes for concern, as all Christians want to be alert to the worldly powers and principalities that might be subtly shaping our sexual imaginations and aspirations. Either way, sexuality is not obviously "immutable."

Christopher C. Roberts
Philadelphia, Pa.

The words of a seeker . . .

Thomas Long is not alone in observing that contemporary worship has become just that—too contemporary, too small, lacking in majesty and mystery ("Expect a whirlwind," Feb. 22). But he stops preaching and starts meddling when he attacks the much-loved "Here I Am, Lord." He even has the words wrong. He sees a "cloying self-reference" in the words, "It is I, Lord." But the correct lyric is, "Is it I, Lord?"—a question asked by a seeker in a sincere attempt to discern the will of God.

When worshipers sing in contemporary language, they may be praying in heartfelt praise or in deep personal petition. They are definitely not eating doughnuts and sipping latte, as Long seems to believe.

Rose Trigg
Colorado Springs, Colo.

A propos of Long's concerns over limp worship language: I was considerably dismayed to hear that my church was replacing the traditional words of distribution during communion with the words, "I am because we are." This change, done with great reverence and sincerity, was instituted because some people had found the "body and blood" language "deeply alienating."

Ought we not, when we find a text deeply alienating, engage with that text even more ferociously instead of mellowing it out?

Jeanne Garrison
Cambridge, Mass.

Islamophobia . . .

The news article titled "'Radicalization' hearings worry U.S. Muslims" (Feb. 8) refers to the hearings in Congress sponsored by Representative Peter King. Of course these hearings worry Muslims. It is important to note, however—which this article did not—that these hearings worry millions of people beyond the Muslim community in this country: people of many faiths and no religious faith who are aware that the country's Islamophobia is largely the result of intentional political and emotional manipulation by politicians like King.

Public protest against these hearings, which will target only Muslims, is an important way to show our solidarity across religious lines—and our disgust with cynical politicians.

Heidi Hadsell
President, Hartford Seminary
Hartford, Conn.

New narrative . . .

Thanks for the editorial "Still exceptional?" (Jan. 25). I have read and pondered it in the wake of President Obama's State of the Union message that, not surprisingly, was saturated with references to U.S. exceptionalism. Your call for a "new narrative" is surely correct.

I have the impression that such a narrative will be especially difficult because that U.S. claim is deeply intertwined with two other practices of exceptionalism. The state of Israel trades on an ancient exceptionalism that it imagines gives it a "pass" on current political reality. And the church counts heavily on its exceptionalism as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9).

None of these modes of chosenness serves well. Israel's sense of exceptionalism cuts no ice in the real world of the Near East. The church's claim is unbearably triumphalistic. And it is clear that U.S. exceptionalism, for all our talk about freedom and democracy, serves as a ground for violent exploitation. I do not think all of these claims are equal or commensurate, but they are surely intertwined and mutually supportive; they all wait for a "new narrative."

Walter Brueggemann
Cincinnati, Ohio

Tears and lifeblood . . .

Regarding G. Jeffrey MacDonald's *Thieves in the Temple* (reviewed in the January 25 issue): I'm tired of criticism of the church by those who have no stomach for the hard work it takes to pastor a church. I've done it for 55 years, and I've seen all that MacDonald talks about and more—but the church is still the best thing God has going in this world. I'll listen to MacDonald when his opinions bear the stain not of his wounded idealism but of his tears mixed with his lifeblood.

William Self
Alpharetta, Ga.

April 5, 2011

Climate report

It's been a tough winter in North America. Many regions in the Northeast experienced record amounts of snow. Some southern states endured some of their harshest winter storms. On January 11, every state in the union except Florida had snow on the ground. All this winter weather prompted some people to ask the familiar question: so where are the signs of global warming?

Actually, meteorologists say this kind of weather is what can be expected in North America if global temperatures are rising. Higher temperatures put more moisture into the air, increasing the chances of storms that release large amounts of snow or rain. As climate scientists have been telling us, global warming means more volatile weather all around—droughts in some places, floods or heavy snowstorms elsewhere.

We can't, of course, extrapolate from a few events to a conclusion about global warming. That's why we need the scientists who have been monitoring data over decades and tracing it over the centuries. That's why we need to do more than talk about the weather. We need to attend to the unusually rapid increase in the Earth's temperature over the past 50 years and to the strong evidence that the Arctic ice cap is melting, the glaciers are disappearing, the sea level is rising, the oceans are becoming more acidic, and plants and animals are altering their behavior in response to shifting temperatures. And we need to pay attention to the overwhelming number of scientists who say that the global warming is caused at least in part by human behavior in the form of carbon emissions, which are concentrating greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and warming up the Earth for decades or centuries to come—perhaps permanently.

That is, anyway, the prudent thing to do. But last month a House energy panel disregarded the scientific evidence on global warming and voted to strip the Environmental Protection Agency of its ability to regulate greenhouse gases. In the absence of a comprehensive energy reform bill, the EPA's regulatory power is about the only tool available to control carbon emissions.

Scientists in favor of regulation told the panel that increased temperatures are decreasing the yields of wheat, corn and barley, heightening the risk of wildfires and increasing the odds of floods and droughts. But rather than listening to that evidence, the panel listened to the coal and gas industries, which want to escape higher costs and tighter regulation, even at the expense of the health of the planet.

Many national leaders talk about cutting spending so as not to burden future generations with the deficits created by this generation. These same leaders seem to have no problem, however, burdening the next generation with an overheated Earth, nor do they mind letting the next generation be the one to invest in renewable and sustainable forms of energy.

A House energy panel heeded not science but the coal and gas industries.

CENTURY marks

FORGOTTEN PEACEMAKERS: It is largely forgotten that more than 20,000 British men of military age refused the draft during World War I. Harassed by the government and their fellow citizens, some were forced to go to the front, others were imprisoned. Among the imprisoned: a future winner of the Nobel Prize, more than a dozen future members of Parliament and a future cabinet minister. Bertrand Russell, Britain's most highly regarded philosopher at the time, was one of the most outspoken supporters of the resisters and served a short prison sentence for his writings defending them (*American Scholar*, Spring).

STUDY WAR NO MORE: Michael Izbicki grew up in a nondenominational church in California. A National Merit Scholarship finalist, he chose to go to the

U.S. Naval Academy out of a sense of duty to his country during a time of war. At the naval academy he began to doubt whether the career to which he had committed himself could be squared with the tenets of just war doctrine. He got in trouble when he responded no to this exam question: "If given the order, would you launch a missile carrying a nuclear warhead?" After a four-year legal battle, the navy discharged him as a conscientious objector. Izbicki may have to reimburse the service for part or all of his education (*New York Times*, February 22).

GLEANINGS: Marilyn Chandler McEntyre agrees with Kenneth Burke's observation that literature is "equipment for living." McEntyre, a literature professor, calls herself a gleaner, a collector of phrases and sentences from literature that have helped her to gain

perspective, direction, healing or to laugh, reclaim her deepest desires and remember her deepest purposes. The skill of good reading, she says, is not just to notice what one is reading but also to allow one's self to be addressed by it, "to take it personally," she says. Even with secular texts the Holy Spirit can "enable us to receive whatever gift is there for our growth and our use" (*Books & Culture*, March/April).

ATHEISTS UNITED: The Secular Student Alliance, a growing network of agnostics and atheists on college campuses, now has chapters on some religious campuses, including California Lutheran University. The members of the Cal Lutheran chapter have deliberately avoided being confrontational with the religious ethos of the campus. They've studied other religions and visited worship services. On the whole, the secular group has been well received. The chapter president is also the student body president. The presence of this group on campus has spawned another group—a club for Christian students with a conservative bent (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 27).

OPPRESSIVE CHRISTIANS? The University of California at Davis has decided that Christians may not be oppressors after all. A university policy document, "The Principles of Community," defined religious and spiritual discrimination as "the loss of power and privilege to those who do not practice the dominant culture's religion." It claimed that in the U.S. there is institutionalized oppression of those who aren't Christian. When the pro-Christian law firm Alliance Defense Fund objected to this claim, a university executive



said the definition would be removed from the document (beliefnet.com).

FALLEN STAR: Brandon Davies, a star on Brigham Young University's nationally ranked basketball team, was suspended for the remainder of the season because he violated the Mormon-run school's honor code which prohibits premarital sex. BYU, ranked third at the time, had been expected to gain a top seed in the annual NCAA tournament. Davies was allowed to remain in school while his situation was reviewed by the Honor Code Office. According to a source close to the program, Davies was "extremely remorseful, heartbroken," but has accepted the school's punishment (*Salt Lake Tribune*, March 3).

SPECIAL WELCOME: More than two dozen Houston-area churches sponsored a "Bring Your Gay Teen to Church Day." Organized by the Houston Clergy Council, the event was a response to an area teenager's suicide after years of being bullied. Meanwhile, megachurch pastor Joel Osteen of Houston told CNN that he believes homosexuality is a sin. Osteen acknowledged that some gays attend his church but said he doesn't preach on the subject (*Houston Chronicle*, February 19).

TIBETAN SUCCESSION: The Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, plans to turn over political power to the elected prime minister of the Tibetan government in exile. This move is designed to ensure that there isn't a political vacuum after the Dalai Lama dies and that there is an effective response to Chinese crackdowns against the Tibetans. A spokesperson for the Chinese government said the move is designed to fool the international community. The Chinese fear that the Dalai Lama will return to Tibet, which one Chinese official said would be a greater threat than a "vast army" (*Los Angeles Times*, March 10).

GOOD MOTIVES: In a conversation with the Dalai Lama, an Indian politician suggested that politicians don't need religion. The Dalai Lama responded: "Politicians need religion even more

"The good guys don't always win, but their chances increase greatly when they play their cards well. Nonviolent resistance is about finding and exploiting points of leverage in one's own society. Every dictatorship has vulnerabilities, and every society can find them."

— Erica Chenoweth, assistant professor of government at Wesleyan University, whose research on major nonviolent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006 found that over 50 percent of the nonviolent movements succeeded, while about 25 percent of the violent ones did (*New York Times*, March 10)

"American Muslims are frustrated that we continue to be associated with the villains that we have already expelled from our community rather than the heroes who we are trying to inspire our children to emulate."

— Eboo Patel on the hearings sponsored by Representative Peter King (R., N.Y.) on alleged Muslim radicalization in American mosques ("On faith" blog, *Washington Post*, March 7)

than a hermit in retreat. If the hermit acts inspired by bad motivation, he'll harm only himself. But if a politician, who can directly influence an entire society, acts with bad motivation, a large number of people will experience the negative consequences." The Dalai Lama regards "every action carried out with good motivation as religious" (*My Spiritual Journey*, HarperOne).

NEWS CYCLE: A blogger at the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America pointed out that

some lines of Paul-Gordon Chandler's March 22 *CENTURY* article on events in Egypt are unusually close to lines in a February 19 article in the *New York Times*—and charges that Chandler lifted them from the *Times*. However, reporters often make use of the frequent informal e-mail updates from Cairo that Chandler sends to friends and churches—which is what appears to have happened in this case. Says Chandler, an Anglican priest in Cairo: "We are happy to help all those trying to get information out."

RELIGIOUS GROUPS AGREEING WITH TEA PARTY



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SOURCE: PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

Peter J. Gomes, 1942–2011

Harvard's preacher

by William H. Willimon

THE GUEST PREACHER

opened his sermon with a rather long explication of Augustine's contrast between blessings and consolations. It was probably the first time most of the listeners at Duke Chapel had heard of *The City of God*. The preacher then reflected on how he had grown to appreciate the blessing of human sexuality. He was reminded of a story about Queen Victoria, who on the night before her wedding supposedly asked her mother how to handle the challenge of marital relations. "My dear, just close your eyes, lie back, and think of England," reported the preacher.

Even the Duke football team—which, since it was "Football Sunday," was packed unwillingly into the front pews—listened intently at this point.

"Young men," said the preacher, looking down on the football players, "Enjoy the gift of sexuality. True, it can make you miserable; but it can also bring you great joy. Don't think that you invented this particular pleasure—surely even you have read the Book of Genesis."

Then, raising his voice to a virtual shout: "God has blessed us with sexual procreation, ordered us to be 'fruitful and multiply'—surely one of the Lord's most gracious commands."

The young jocks, indeed the whole congregation, was now sitting upright, uncertain whether to laugh, cheer or be indignant.

"Be fruitful! Enjoy the full range of God's gifts! Do not delay until you are decrepit and wasted. Look upon me and become wise. Imagine me in the shower. I don't care how much you are working out and how firm your biceps, one day you shall be as I. Obey Genesis 1:28!"

The sole postservice comment I recall came from a member of the defensive line: "What kind of accent was that anyhow?"

I feel sorry for those who never got to hear Peter J. Gomes work a congregation while a biblical text worked him. The theology displayed in his writing is biblical, in a highly imaginative way—a sort of eloquent last hurrah of New England Christian liberalism at its very

your intellectual limits; you shall know a great deal more about biblical eschatology before I'm done with you this morning."

I have known few preachers with more reverence for the homiletical arts and almost none who were more grateful that God had called him to preach. He once told me that he was ready to "robe up for the game anytime Harvard wants something said in a way that adds

Two or three stereotypes were sure to be broken when you met Peter Gomes.

best. He was a fine teacher, a legendary dinner-table raconteur, a self-described "secretary of state for religion" at Harvard, an Anglophile, a sometime organist and a perennially best-selling author. But his primary vocation was as a preacher.

Peter's pulpit posture might be described as one of gracious contempt for his congregation—no small achievement for a preacher at a place like Harvard. I greatly envied Peter's ability to be embraced by a congregation even as he ridiculed it, using his unique brogue—a mix of New England and upper-class British accents, with a hint of Harvard and a dash of southern gentility.

"We're in Advent, eschatological season *par excellence*," Peter would start a sermon, "and don't lie to me, you know little of eschatology; don't even attempt to fake that you do. You're thinking, 'Eschatology—isn't that a subspecialty of proctology?' But do not despair of

weight, no matter how trivial the occasion."

When I got Peter to speak at my alma mater, Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, Peter addressed a packed house in Wofford's Old Main, a building built by slave labor with bricks made by slaves on campus.

"I am not unmindful of the significance of this building, nor my presence in this pulpit," he said. "As a preacher, I'm accustomed to answering to the claims of the dead. I am acutely aware, at an occasion such as this, we are accompanied by the dead, anonymous and remembered, surrounding us, wanting to speak to us. Yet the voiceless dead cannot speak without us. Thus I speak to you . . ."

Peter's skill as a speaker made him the darling of Harvard alumni associations around the world. Two or three stereotypes were sure to be broken in the first five minutes of encountering this African-American Baptist, sometime Republican,

Massachusetts-born preacher of Portuguese descent. (Peter was incensed to discover that Harvard was counting him as both an African-American and a Hispanic: "It's Gomes, you fools! Not Gomez!"). His many crossover identities equipped Peter to be a great apologist in dozens of unlikely settings. He always rendered his apology for the faith without groveling or patronizing.

One of the greatest sermons Peter preached was not on a Sunday morning from the pulpit of Harvard's Memorial Church but on the church's front steps. Speaking to a throng that had gathered after a gay hate crime on campus, he announced that he was "a Christian who happens as well to be gay."

One Sunday morning, after we had chatted in the vestry before the service at Memorial Church, Peter pulled out his big gold pocket watch (who but Peter carried a gold watch?), flipped it open, then closed it and said, "The hour hath come. Let us pray for grace." My knees were buckling at the thought of preaching in that space in my high-pitched southern twang, but I was emboldened by Peter's "Go get 'em, friend."

One Sunday, as Peter sat in that vestry and prepared for the morning service, a student usher entered and stammered, "There's somebody preaching here this morning."

Peter replied, "Of course, me."

"I mean there's somebody preaching



DIVINE JOLT: Gomes exercised his preaching gifts at Harvard's Memorial Church.

missioned to preach that day a word direct from the Lord.

"Look you," said Peter, in love, "this is my pulpit. I have earned the right to preach in this place. No one is going to deliver any word from the Lord today

ued her drivel unabated. They should thank God that their pastor is not some intellectual wimp."

When I got word that Peter had died, I recalled some of his memorable pronouncements, uttered in his inimitable voice: "Anything worth saying in a sermon is worth taking at least 40 minutes to say it." "What that preacher said, he said quite well, though what he said could have been as well left unsaid."

Peter's preaching was a divinely inspired jolt—biblical, urbane and intelligent.

"I never believed, never wanted to believe," a recent Harvard graduate said to me, "until I heard Professor Gomes speak. His wit and old-fashioned eloquence coaxed me into the faith I didn't desire until he told me about it in a sermon." Any preacher could die happy with such a eulogy. cc

except for the Reverend Doctor Peter J. Gomes. Now you go sit down on that pew and keep your mouth shut or I will call the campus police after I wring your head off."

Peter reported that the woman sat there throughout the service—silent, with a beatific smile upon her face.

"As the prelude ended, I looked with scorn upon my congregation," Peter confessed. "White, guilt-ridden liberals all, they would have sat there all morning, doing nothing while that woman contin-

Few preachers have had more reverence for the homiletical arts.

in the pulpit. Now. Is that OK?" "What?" Peter thrust his head into the sanctuary. Aghast, he saw an African-American woman in the pulpit ranting at the docile congregation, screaming over the organ prelude. Indignantly, Peter hustled over to her and hissed through gritted teeth, "You, come down here this instant. Yes, you."

The intruder stared down at Peter.

"This instant!" he sneered.

Startled, she came down the steps and informed Peter that she had been com-

William H. Willimon is bishop of the North Alabama Conference in the United Methodist Church.

Companions on his journey

Staying with Jesus

by Anne M. Jernberg

AS A DIVINITY school student I knew that Jesus needed me to love my enemies and serve the “least of these.” I even discerned that perhaps Jesus needed me to pastor people in a church context. Likewise, there was no question of my need for Jesus. My Baptist heritage had sung me into that knowledge: “I want Jesus to walk with me. All along my pilgrim journey, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.”

But it had never dawned on me that Jesus needed me, at least not until Holy Week a few years ago. I was on my knees in a monastery. I was imagining being in the Garden of Gethsemane as the brothers and other worshipers and I gathered and sang the Taizé refrain “Stay with me; remain here with me, watch and pray, watch and pray” over and over again. It was then that I realized that Jesus needed me to walk with him throughout his life.

I had come to the monastery that evening for a brief respite from my studies. I left four hours later with bruised knees, an aching back, a raspy voice and a growling stomach. To top it off, I felt guilty because I didn’t stay through the night. (The brothers began singing that night and continued to sing in shifts until the Good Friday service the following afternoon.)

When I showed up at 5:00 p.m., I took my regular seat in the nave of the chapel and expected the usual half-hour evening prayer service to begin. It never dawned on me that the usual evening prayer service would be radically altered because we were remembering an unusual evening in Jesus’ life. Instead of simply remembering something, I experienced something that night. Someone read the words Jesus prayed in the garden,

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42), and then we were instructed to get on our knees and begin singing. That was it—one brief scripture followed by 18 hours of singing four simple phrases.

Some sang the phrases through a few times and then got up and left, looking awkward and unsure. Others lasted longer. I made it for a few hours. The length of our stay was not as important as the fact that we stayed—we remained with Jesus. My knees would have given

stepping toward other people, healing wounds, offering forgiving words, teaching life-changing truths. But in the last week of his life, he comes even closer to us because we see him struggling with his own brokenness; we can share the emotions of loneliness in addition to imagining the pain of his physically broken body on the cross. He breaks bread with his friends, and one of his friends betrays him. Peter denies knowing him. Holy Week is full of moments when those closest to Jesus let him down. As his disciples, we need not let him down during this time;

We need for Jesus to need us to share in his life.

anything to be strolling with Jesus, as I was kneeling on a hard slate floor and could feel its chill through my wool pants. (I wondered if the brothers were wearing kneepads underneath their cassocks.)

That night on my knees changed my understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. I am not sure whether it was the hypnotic empathy I developed for the disciples who fell asleep that night or the heaviness that weighed on my heart as I sang the same song over and over, realizing that my words were close to the thoughts of Jesus and that his thoughts were an earnest plea for companionship during an excruciating, long and lonely night.

The experience also changed the way I worship during Holy Week. If the last week of Jesus’ life is holy, then it is set apart from every other week of his life. That is why we need to not be apart from Jesus during this time. Jesus was always

we need not lose the opportunity for transformation and succumb to a fate that flies in the face of resurrection hope.

We love to celebrate the peaks of Jesus’ life in worship, but how often do we remain with him during the valleys of his life? Holy Week can be more holy if we prepare to spend time with Jesus, becoming a part of his life and a companion on his journey.

This will be the fifth year that I have created daily Holy Week services of 20 to 30 minutes for my congregation. The scriptures are simple, the ideas are not unique, but those who gather draw closer to Jesus in profound ways. Together we experience Palm Sunday as the threshold on the path to the cross.

The services may include foot washing or communion, with each person washing the feet of the next or serving commun-

Anne M. Jernberg is a pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado.

ion to him or her. For one service, volunteers created a garden in the chapel with plants and flowers; people were invited to come into the garden with images or words representative of “their will” and “God’s will.” After sitting a while they left one image in the garden and returned to their seats with the other.

Instead of a ritual of anointing, sometimes I give each person a picture of Jesus on the cross or in the garden or at the table or in the tomb. The person dips his or her fingers in oil and anoints the picture as a prayer of solidarity and companionship and compassion to and for Jesus himself. Instead of offering spoken

commentary on the seven last words of Christ, I pair each verse with an image and allow time for reflection. On Good Friday, I close the service by lifting up my hands in a gesture toward heaven and walking out in silence. On Holy Saturday we sing, “Stay with me, remain here with me, watch and pray, watch and pray” while people light candles at the altar that’s been transformed to represent a tomb. There are many possibilities.

“Being with” and “walking alongside” Jesus through his life is light-years beyond simply reading about his life and trying to follow its example. Living out our faith means not only remembering

the Incarnate One but also reexperiencing what he experienced, realizing that his human experience was full of human needs—including companionship. If we believe in the living Holy Spirit, then why would Jesus not continue to need us to walk with him, if not for his sake, then to show our love and gratitude to the One who sent him to walk with us?

We need for Jesus to need us to share in his life. Otherwise we are people who ask him to meet our needs without growing in a relationship that requires something of us and challenges us to appreciate the grace we have been receiving all along. cc

Reading the Bible in unexpected places

Dislocated exegesis

by Lauren Winner

IT IS A BRIGHT, cold Holy Thursday morning, and I am standing outside an immigration detention center that is creepily located in a suburban office park in Cary, North Carolina. Unmarked white vans pull up to unload people who have been newly detained by officials of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

I am here to participate in a foot washing and a demonstration on behalf of detainees, who are frequently, as ICE executive director James Pendergraph indelicately put it in 2008, made to “disappear.” As my friends and I gather, a white van pulls up. A man is taken out and led into the building. He looks at us. He looks down. He looks like Jesus to me.

As we start the foot washing, the police tell us to leave. I feel queasy, but I stand with the others under threat of arrest. Hours later, the police change their minds and tell us that we can stay

as long as we want—so, of course, we decide it is time to go home. Before we leave, we gather for a moment of prayer.

Patrick takes out a Bible and begins to read. To my surprise he’s not reading from Isaiah or Ezekiel, not reading a passage about liberating the captives or returning desperate people to their homes. He is reading 1 Corinthians 13, a passage I usually hear at weddings or see on a piece of cross-stitch.

“Love is patient; love is kind. . . .” Usually, when I hear this passage my ears tend to go deaf. The sentiments seem trite. I feel like I could be reading a Hallmark card. But here at the ICE center in Cary, the passage is confounding. I try to listen to Patrick, to stay in his firm syllables, but I am struggling to place what I hear, to understand what this hackneyed passage about love has to say about the detention center, where the central white object is not a

wedding dress but a van for rounding up people.

And then, in the confusing space of the detention center parking lot, I begin to hear the words. I begin to hear that what St. Paul meant had nothing to do with Valentine’s Day; that when Paul said love, he was not speaking about a feeling or even a way of treating the people close to you; that when Paul said love, he was speaking about the identity of a man who was once arrested on Holy Thursday.

Later, a colleague told me that what we were doing with the Bible at that detention center had a name: “dislocated exegesis.” This is the practice of reading scripture in unexpected places, in places that might unsettle the reading you were likely to bring to

Lauren Winner teaches at Duke Divinity School.

the text. My colleague is in the habit of taking a Bible and a group of students, for example, to a bank and reading Jesus' words about money.

Dislocated exegesis makes intuitive sense to me: where you read changes how you read. Safely within the blush-colored walls of my house I might be able to keep some readings out. So I have begun an experiment: once a week, in some place where I find myself, some place other than home or my office, I carve out half an hour to read one small biblical passage. I do this most often alone but sometimes with friends from school or church.

As with every other spiritual practice with which I have any acquaintance, my dislocated reading does not always produce startling insights or some sort of spiritual uplift. Sometimes I don't get much further than an elementary question like, what can this promise of healing mean here in this oncology unit? Sometimes I get a little further. Sometimes I hear new things.

Once, outside an insurance building in Hartford, the insurance capital of the world, I read Jesus' unsettling instructions: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. . . . Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are

you not much more valuable than they?"

On an airplane I read God's description of lifting up the children of Israel on eagle's wings.

At a friend's wedding populated by my ex-husband's best friends, I slipped away from the hors d'oeuvres and punch bowl and read near the end of Revelation, "And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto

for dislocated-exegesis opportunities. A friend of mine, who knows how uncomfortable I am with this, recently showed up with a box wrapped in shiny blue paper. Inside was a crocodile-embossed Pepto-Bismol-pink Bible cover with handles. It is tackier than whatever you're picturing. "From the Trendsetter line," said Dina with a grin.

I am sitting in a bakery, eating a bagel and reading John 6, Jesus' proclamation

Dislocated exegesis makes intuitive sense: where you read a text changes how you read it.

the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:9, KJV). I have a feeling I am going to see these same friends at that marriage supper, too.

After listening to a presentation at church about how pollution makes its way through the Eno River all the way to the Pamlico Sound, I sat by the Eno and read about Namaan, the leper, "restored [to] the flesh of a young boy" by a sevenfold immersion in the river Jordan.

Outside the Bank of America Corporate Center in Charlotte, the tallest building in the state, I read about the Tower of Babel.

At my father's house, the Shabbat candlesticks right behind me, I read the resurrection scene in John: the disciples are in the upper room with the door locked "for fear of the Jews."

This practice of dislocated exegesis has meant, among other things, that I have started carrying a Bible around with me. This is not something I ever pictured myself doing; alas, I don't think of myself as a serious Bible reader, let alone a Bible toter. In novels, if you meet a Bible-carrying character, you know the novelist is economically telling you that the person is a bore, or a hypocrite, or seriously pious—or all three. I am sure I am a hypocrite; I like to imagine I am not a bore; and I take piety as a goal that I am far from achieving. Yet here I am, carrying around a Bible, alert

that he is the Bread of Life. When I've read these words in the past my thoughts have gone either to the Eucharist (that is, I snippily wonder how Christian communities who take communion only a few times a year make sense of "The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty"). Or else I've thought about actual feeding—for this isn't just any metaphor Jesus is concocting, it is a metaphor that should make those of us who want to offer Jesus to the world give actual bread. On very rare occasions, after thinking these things, I actually have done something in response—hie to a Eucharist; drop off loaves of bread at a food pantry.

But I don't think I've ever read this passage while eating before, and this morning I am having a very simple, animal-hunger experience. I arrived at this bakery at around 11 a.m., not having eaten since dinner. I'd inhaled half of my bagel in about 45 seconds. I was relieved to chew, to swallow. And then I read about the Bread of Life. For a moment in this bakery in suburban Connecticut, I understand how famished I am, how hollowed-out hungry I am to feed on Jesus.

It won't last. I will forget before I finish my chai. I will go on about my day as though I hadn't, for a few intensely felt seconds, heard a rumor of reality: how deep the hunger, how nourishing the food.

States of being

Stability is greatly overrated.

Why would I ever want to sit still and smug as a rock, confident, because of my great weight, that I will not be moved?

Better to be soft as water, easily troubled, with at least three modes of being, able to shape-shift, to mirror, to cleanse, to drift downstream,

To roar when I encounter the rock.

Luci Shaw

Clashes and coalitions

by Paul-Gordon Chandler

ON MARCH 11, the one-month anniversary of Hosni Mubarak's resignation, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets to celebrate national unity and condemn sectarianism. The marchers held banners reading "Muslims and Christians are one." Hundreds of people held up crosses and copies of the Qur'an, chanting "Christians and Muslims are one hand."

Yet just days earlier, a church was burned south of Cairo and clashes between Christians and Muslims left 13 dead and over 140 injured in an impoverished Cairo suburb.

What is going on?

As is often the case within outbreaks of religious violence, the immediate reasons are complex and local. A conflict had been brewing for months in the village of Sol in Etfeeh after it was discovered that a Christian man had fallen in love with a Muslim woman. To clear the Muslim family's name, a cousin in the family murdered the Muslim woman's father, which led to the woman's brother (the son of the murdered father) avenging the death of his father by killing his cousin. During the emotional funeral, some Muslims who blamed Christians for the murders were incited to attack a nearby church. The church was torched and some Christians fled their homes in fear.

On March 7, Coptic Christians from the Manshiyet Nasr neighborhood in Cairo, a predominantly Christian area that is home to the city's garbage collectors, took to the streets to protest the burning of the Sol village church. Some one thousand young Copts blocked two main roads, bringing traffic on the east side of Cairo to a halt for two hours. Even though their priest, knowing the potential for conflict, begged them to stop, the men continued, burning tires and throwing rocks at passing cars. When

they were confronted by Muslims, violent clashes erupted. Molotov cocktails and stones were thrown at each other throughout the night before the army was able to calm the situation.

A priest in the area said that this clash was not a conflict between Muslims and Christians of the area. "The attack was organized and [involved] guns. Muslim residents [here] don't have weapons."

His comments reflect the widespread view that the sectarian clashes are being orchestrated by pro-Mubarak members of the State Security and by members of Mubarak's National Democratic Party who aim to foster chaos and therefore lead to the triumph of Mubarak's party in coming elections.

In a sermon delivered in Tahrir Square on March 11, Sheikh Muzhir Shahin warned that some people desire "to incite sectarian tensions and waste the gains of the revolution." Father Filopateer, a Coptic priest, insisted that the use of the words "sectarian tension" to depict the conflict is incorrect. He sees the violence as instances of criminal acts, not the result of religious tensions.

The Muslim Brotherhood has blamed the clashes on the remnants of Mubarak's regime. "These people are operating under the principle of 'divide to conquer' and have incited a group of Muslim extremists to bring up other sectarian issues."

The January 25 Revolution Youth Coalition sent representatives to Sol, where they met with political and religious figures to help calm the situation. The coalition has also enlisted over a thousand volunteers to assist in rebuilding the church.

Following up on their promise to rebuild the burned church and bring those



PHOTO COURTESY OF YASMINE PERNI

CROSS AND CRESCENT: A young girl celebrates the Day of National Unity on March 11—the one-month anniversary of Mubarak's resignation.

behind the attack to justice, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces began reconstruction work on March 13.

A special delegation of key Muslim and Coptic figures went to Sol, including the famous Salafi Muslim cleric Sheikh Mohamed Hassan, the Coptic political activist George Ishaq and Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Al-Beltagy. They met the heads of the Muslim and Christian families and visited Copts' houses. Perhaps the most moving act was the visit of television lay preacher Amr Khaled, one of the most popular preachers in the Muslim world. Often called the "Muslim Billy Graham," Khaled preached on March 11 in the main mosque of the village of Sol and challenged his listeners: "And my message here today for Muslims and the Christians is: Let's be one hand. Each one of the people here in Sol has to do something. First we must each stop this problem in our own homes."

So the spirit of interfaith solidarity is still alive. It was notably illustrated when Prime Minister Essam Sharaf closed his nationwide television interview by mentioning that he had just received two phone calls. The first was from an Egyptian on pilgrimage (Hajj) in Saudi Arabia who promised to pray for him. The second was from a Christian friend of his son's who said he and his fiancée light a candle every day for him in prayer. **CC**

Paul-Gordon Chandler is rector at St. John's Church/Maadi in Cairo and is the author of Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road.

A win for death penalty opponents

ON ASH WEDNESDAY, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed a law abolishing the death penalty in his state, making the Land of Lincoln the 16th state where capital punishment is no longer an option.

"It is impossible to create a perfect system, free of all mistakes," Quinn said after signing the death penalty law, which takes effect July 1. "I think it's the right and just thing to abolish the death penalty and punish those who commit heinous crimes—evil people—with life in prison without parole or any chance of release."

Quinn, who is Catholic, revealed that he turned to his faith—to the Bible and to Catholic leaders and tradition—in contemplating the bill that lawmakers delivered to him in January.

The governor even quoted Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the beloved archbishop of Chicago who died in 1996, saying, "In a complex, sophisticated democracy like ours, means other than the death penalty are available and can be used to protect society."

Religious leaders have been at the forefront of the death penalty abolitionist movement in Illinois and nationwide. But there has been a disconnect between their activism and the opinions of it.

According to a 2010 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 62 percent of Americans support the death penalty in murder cases, with only 30 percent saying they oppose it. That figure is nearly identical to the results of a similar survey in 2007, but lower than that of a 1996 survey, when 78 percent of Americans said they supported capital punishment for murder and just 18 percent said they were opposed.

Survey results on the death penalty vary little across religious groups—at least among white Americans. Last year, 74 per-

cent of white evangelicals, 71 percent of white mainline Protestants and 68 percent of white Catholics said they favor capital punishment, according to Pew. But fewer than half of black Protestants (37 percent) and Hispanic Catholics (43 percent) said they approve of the death penalty.

"The light of God is shining, shining positively on our state," Illinois state senator Kwame Raoul said after Quinn signed the death penalty ban.

Raoul was not alone in thinking that the Illinois ban is a moral as well as a legal victory for people of good faith. As more states examine whether to eliminate capital punishment, some wonder whether the days of the death penalty are numbered and what, if any, role people of faith might play in reaching such a tipping point.

Racial disparities and too many wrongful convictions are often cited as compelling reasons to abolish the death penalty. In Illinois, for instance, the state executed 12 prisoners after the death penalty was reinstated in 1977. During that time, Illinois also exonerated 20 death row inmates.

"One significant moral problem with



ENDING EXECUTIONS: Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signs a death penalty ban into law March 9, saying "it's the right and just thing" to do.

the state having the authority over capital punishment is that the decision is irrevocable and so often carried out in ways that are racially questionable—studies prove this," said Richard Cizik, a former vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals. "My conscience can't accept this appalling reality.

"If it's not a matter of serious reflection, it should be!" Cizik continued. "To miss the moral questions at stake is to be hard of heart."

According to Mike Farrell, president of the group Death Penalty Focus, many evangelicals and other religious folks still have tough hearts when it comes to moral questions about the death penalty.

What Farrell referred to as the "fundamentalist Christian community" remains "wedded to a political position that embraces state killing and insists that its use is right, holy, biblically ordained and necessary—'the Lord's work,' as some would have it," he said.

Yet Farrell—best known for his role as Capt. B. J. Hunnicutt on TV's *M*A*S*H**—said he's seeing a change of opinion among rank-and-file Catholics, a shift he attributes to the "strength of their leadership's advocacy."

He sees a similar trend emerging among mainstream Protestants but senses "that the shift toward abolition in their community of believers is more reflective of a general awakening on the part of the American public."

Farrell believes people of faith can have a significant impact in moving toward a nationwide abolition by addressing capital punishment as a pressing moral and spiritual concern and shedding light on the "sins of the [justice] system."

"I believe we are moving ever more rapidly to a point where abolition is inevitable," Farrell said. —Cathleen Falsani, RNS

Relief groups mobilize to aid Japan



AS THE EXTENT of the death and destruction from the massive disaster in Japan came into focus, religious relief organizations were sending and supporting teams to assess the damage.

Groups such as World Vision and Baptist World Aid had teams on the ground determining what kinds of experts and supplies will be needed in the recovery from the earthquake and tsunami that struck March 11.

Rachel Wolff, a spokeswoman for World Vision, said a relief manager who had worked at the scenes of earthquakes in Haiti and Pakistan was stunned by the extent of the destruction. "He told me that this was unlike anything he's seen anywhere around the world," she said.

A team of Baptist World Aid workers from the U.S., Singapore and Hungary has arrived in Japan and others are on standby, said Eron Henry, a spokesman for the relief organization of the Baptist World Alliance. By March 14, team members had sent photos of scenes from the tsunami's aftermath, with people housed in shelters and cars covered in water and debris. Henry said the aid organization expects to cooperate with other Baptist organizations in its response.

"We have learned the importance of coordinating a response so that there's no duplication, so there's no overlap and no confusion," he said.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is taking the same approach, said Melissa Hinnen, an UMCOR spokeswoman. But she added that it has been difficult to reach partners

many time zones away who already have their hands full. "We're just waiting to see what they tell us their needs are," she said.

"The damage and loss of life is almost impossible to comprehend," said Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches.

"Spiritual support and healing ministry will be required long after the initial impact of the disaster," said Kinnamon, referring to the NCC's relief partner Church World Service and other organizations. "We pray for the faith and patience to remain committed for as long as it takes," he said.

The Church of the Brethren's Mission and Ministry Board was meeting in Elgin, Illinois, when news of the quake and tsunami came. Brethren disaster ministries made plans to support CWS and its partner in relief efforts. Likewise, United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples) relief officials sought to coordinate their plans.

Meanwhile, many U.S. congregations—Christian and Buddhist—had started planning their responses to the crisis.

An aide to Bishop Koshin Ogui of the predominantly Japanese-heritage Buddhist Churches of America on March 14 drafted a letter to national leaders about donating to a relief fund for victims of the quake and tsunami.

"There is great empathy for the people of Japan and wanting to do something to help ease the difficulty," said Gerald Sakamoto, minister of the San Jose (California) Buddhist Church. —RNS, other sources

Failing as pastor hurts, talking about it is hard

Sometimes being a pastor is a real pain. But few pastors want to admit it. J. R. Briggs is trying to change that.

That's why Briggs, a blogger and pastor of the Renew Community in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, is organizing the Epic Fail Pastors Conference, which is set for April 14–16 at a church-turned-bar 25 minutes outside of Philadelphia. Briggs hopes to make space for pastors to speak their minds without fear.

The conference grew out of a blog post that Briggs wrote last summer. Many ministers' conferences are flashy events with rock bands and presentations from big church pastors, who take the stage and talk about their great successes.

But those presentations don't match the daily realities for pastors, especially at small churches, Briggs said. "Most of the time, you feel like I'm never going to be that guy on stage—I am preaching to 42 people, including the noisy kids," he said. Briggs hopes the Epic Fail conference will remind pastors that it's OK to be human and that failure is normal.

After all, he said, most of the leaders in the Bible were failures. David was an adulterer who betrayed a close friend. Moses was a murderer. Paul persecuted Christians before his conversion. And the disciples spent a lot of time bumbling around after Jesus.

"The entrance exam for Christianity is admitting you are a failure," Briggs said. But pastors, he said, are often expected to be perfect. That means they can't admit their doubts or failings. If they do, they can be shamed by their peers and parishioners.

"I am not afraid of failure," said Briggs. "I am afraid of the shame that comes from the rejection that comes from failure."

So Briggs suggested a conference at which leaders could put their worst foot forward. The response was overwhelming. Hundreds of comments, e-mails and phone calls flooded in, with tales of ministers' failings, both personal and professional. That led to the blog post becoming reality.

Fittingly the conference will be held at a church that failed and became a bar.

"The stained glass has been replaced by neon Sam Adams signs and the pews have been replaced by pool tables," Briggs said.

The conference is relatively cheap at \$79, not including lodging, and will be low key. Several pastors will talk about their failures and lessons they've learned from them, and there will be time for discussion. Briggs said he's not revealing the names of speakers ahead of time. But he is insisting that those speakers hang around for the whole event, rather than popping in and then leaving. On the last day, participants will share communion. Already ministers from as far away as Australia have signed up.

Adam McHugh isn't surprised. A former pastor who is now an author, McHugh said he tried being honest about his struggles as pastor when he was in ministry.

His parishioners were not thrilled. Some said he was not fit to be a pastor after admitting he'd been to see counselors. Others tried to undermine his leadership role.

"I think we all feel a real tension as pastors—we want to be spiritual role models, but we also want to be ourselves and acknowledge that we fail," he said. "This is why pastoral ministry can be hazardous to our spiritual lives."

The recession has made things worse. In some denominations there are more ministers looking for work than there are jobs. Church budgets are tight, meaning that many small churches have trouble keeping a full-time pastor. Admitting failure isn't good for job security. "The job can be brutal enough already, and the pay is already low, so the financial, emotional and relational costs, on top of those other costs, for sharing honestly are often not worth it," said McHugh.

Scot McKnight, blogger and professor of New Testament at North Park University in Chicago, isn't surprised that the issue of failure has struck a nerve with ministers. He said that ministry can be especially difficult for pastors of non-denominational churches who don't have the support structure or a network of peers that a denomination can provide.

McKnight sees signs for hope, though. He said that older church members expected their pastors to be perfect. That's not always the case with younger churchgoers.

"In the previous generation, there

was a lot of emphasis that the pastor had to be distant, apart from the congregation, and holy," he said. "Failure was seen as a sign of betrayal. For this generation, admitting failure is part of the pastoral task." —Bob Smietana, RNS

Is Phelps a role model on free speech issues?

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-to-1 that the "Thank God for Dead Soldiers" protesters from Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas have First Amendment rights to protest military funerals, the question being asked is: What's ahead?

More protests from religious groups? Or more efforts to limit them?

The court majority determined March 2 that minister Fred Phelps and members of his small, independent Baptist church in Topeka had free-speech rights to protest within 300 feet of the funeral of Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder, who was killed in Iraq in 2006.

The court's lone dissenter, Justice Samuel Alito, argued that it was wrong for protesters to continue "inflicting severe and lasting emotional injury on an ever-growing list of innocent victims."

Legal experts differ on whether Westboro will now be a role model for other religious groups with strong views deemed offensive. John Whitehead, president of the Rutherford Institute, which filed an amicus brief in support of Westboro's right to protest, said the decision could provide more room to air unpopular religious views.

Whitehead is already defending a street preacher who was ordered by police to stop using a handheld microphone on a public sidewalk outside last year's Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester, Virginia. "I think it's going to protect those kinds of people," said Whitehead, who is based in Charlottesville, Virginia.

But Ira Lupu, a church-state expert at George Washington University Law School, said there are probably few groups comparable to Westboro that would seize on this case because the group's "God Hates Fags" signs are just too extreme.

"People just don't do that," Lupu said. "Everybody hates you if you do that. That's the inhibitor, not the law."

Westboro, however, stands ready to "quadruple" its protests at military funerals, Margie J. Phelps, the lead attorney for the church, told reporters, according to ABC News.

The high court's ruling protected Westboro from a claim by Snyder's father that he deserved financial compensation for emotional distress, defamation and "intentional infliction of emotional distress" caused by the church members' appearance at his time of grief.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, said even "hurtful speech" on public matters cannot be stifled. "Speech is powerful," he wrote. "It can stir people to action, move them to tears of both joy and sorrow, and—as it did here—inflict great pain. On the facts before us, we cannot react to that pain by punishing the speaker."

Roberts pointed out that Westboro members never entered the church property where the funeral occurred, weren't violent and didn't yell. Lupu and Whitehead agreed that if Phelps's protesters had been more physically disruptive, the decision could have been different. "Simply put, the church members had the right to be where they were," Roberts said.

Alito, however, forcefully disagreed. "In order to have a society in which public issues can be openly and vigorously debated, it is not necessary to allow the brutalization of innocent victims," he wrote. —Adelle M. Banks, RNS



FAVORABLE RULING: The Supreme Court gave antigay crusader Fred Phelps the right to stage protests at military funerals.

Muslims watch warily as House holds hearing

THEY WERE MOVED when the first Muslim elected to Congress shed tears discussing a Muslim who died trying to save others on 9/11. They were irked by accusations from House members and annoyed when fellow Muslims maligned their faith.

At times they constituted an Amen corner. At other moments, they jeered and glared at the images beamed live from Capitol Hill.

But for the most part, the dozen Muslims gathered in Sterling, Virginia, on March 10 at the home of a local grassroots activist sat silently as they watched the House Homeland Security Committee's hearing on "the extent of radicalization in the American Muslim Community."

The hearings, spearheaded by chairman Peter King (R., N.Y.), drew loud protests from many U.S. Muslims before they even started. Too many politicians are blaming too many Muslims for the heinous actions of a few, they said.

In Boston, Aatif Harden went to watch at New England's largest mosque, a facility that opened in 2009 after years of resistance from locals. Harden, active in the Muslim American Society, had anticipated that at least a few friends would join him at the mosque. But they were too busy with work or school, he said, to spend time watching Washington.

Malik Khan, president of the Islamic Center of Boston in Wayland, Massachusetts, was among those who skipped the viewing party. "Sometimes I think the hell with it," he said. "We do so many good things, and people still just want to demonize us."

So Harden watched the hearings alone. He didn't say much, until Rep. Frank Wolf (R., Va.) accused the Council on American-Islamic Relations of terrorist sympathies. "All of this stuff is old," he said. "What's an unindicted co-conspirator anyway? What the hell is that?"

The feeling was much the same back in Virginia, where 28-year-old

Salah Ayoubi called similar charges from King "ridiculous." Saba Baig, a 34-year-old homeschooling mother, called CAIR, a Muslim civil rights group with chapters across the country, "our biggest voice."

The gathering was hosted by attorney Hassan Ahmad and his wife, Rabiah Ahmad, an organizer with the grassroots Muslim group My Faith My Voice. One of their guests was Ayah Ibrahim, a 26-year-old graduate student in political science at George

Zuhdi Jasser of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, who he said dwelled on the few radicals and ignored the many law-abiding Muslims. Ayoubi's seven children, for example, include doctors, lawyers and engineers. "It's only [Jasser] who thinks that there's a problem," he said.

Hassan Ahmad accused Jasser of maligning the faith as much as any terrorist. "That's what he's doing, he's hijacking our religion and he's making a statement on our behalf," said Ahmad.

Up in Boston, Harden also had choice words for Jasser. "In the African American community, we have a term, *Uncle Tom*. They're so full of self-loathing and self-hatred," Harden said. "I'm not saying he's that, but he's right on the edge of it."

Harden is part of a group of Muslims who meet monthly with the FBI, and when Jasser said Muslims don't cooperate with law enforcement, Harden snapped at the screen. "I work with the FBI every month," he said. "For him to say Muslims aren't working with the police is a lie, it's an insult."

In both Boston and Virginia, viewers seemed particularly troubled by perceptions that the hearings tarred all Muslims as guilty by association.

"Don't make the whole Muslim community responsible for the acts of a few idiots," Harden said. "Suppose we did that with the African-American community, or the Italian community? Suppose we had hearings about the Italian community being responsible for the mafia?"

When the hearings wrapped up in early afternoon, Harden still thought they were a bad idea. But he was heartened by support from some members of the panel, including Los Angeles County sheriff Lee Baca, who has hired Muslim deputies and built bridges to the local Muslim community.

Given what he had feared or what could have happened, Harden said it could have been worse. —Adelle M. Banks and Omar Sacirbey, RNS



REACHING OUT: Los Angeles County sheriff Lee Baca set up a Muslim liaison unit in 2007, a step that he says has helped build bridges to local Muslims and improve terrorist investigations.

Mason University. Ibrahim wished Muslim leaders had been invited to testify at the hearing.

"They need to bring in Islamic scholars," Ibrahim said, "someone who actually knows what they're talking about."

When King cut off a request for more opening statements from committee Democrats, Ayoubi criticized the congressman. "He doesn't want more of that good stuff to be said," Ayoubi said.

Ayoubi's father, Mazen Ayoubi, 57, was particularly frustrated with witness

Study finds civic engagement is higher among mosquegoers

RESEARCH BY a political science professor shows that affiliation with a mosque increases Muslims' civic engagement. "The more religious American Muslims happen to be, the more they participate in American politics," said Karam Dana, who teaches at Tufts University.

Dana and colleague Matt A. Barreto in 2008 completed the largest-ever survey of American Muslims, asking them, among other questions, whether Islam and the American political system are compatible.

Of those Muslims who do not regularly go to a mosque, 77 percent replied yes to the question of compatibility, Dana said. Among those who are regularly involved in a mosque, that figure rose to 95 percent.

These findings appear to contradict assumptions underpinning the hearings

that Rep. Peter King (R., N.Y.) convened in mid-March as chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, Dana said.

Dana noted that King in 2004 stated that the vast majority of American mosques were controlled by Islamic extremists and amounted to "an enemy living amongst us," and that King in 2007 bemoaned the number of mosques in the nation because they bred "homegrown" terrorists.

Like other religious institutions in the United States, mosques have actually helped members assimilate into society and support democracy, he said.

"Decades of scholarship on religious institutions, be they churches or synagogues, have shown that they foster participation in the political system," said Dana. "We believe that mosques are no different." —RNS

SBC stores pull warning labels from certain books

Southern Baptist bookstores have quietly suspended a four-year-old program that warned customers to read with "discernment" works by several up-and-coming authors whose books "could be considered inconsistent with historical evangelical theology."

Chris Rodgers, the director of product standards and customer relations for Nashville-based LifeWay, said the warnings were discontinued because they were "irrelevant to our customers."

"There was little to no interest in it," Rodgers said. "No one asked about the authors."

The program flagged the writings of some emergent authors with labels advising readers to exercise caution and "extra discernment" in reading particular books. The labels provided the address to a website to learn more about the work or author; the website has since been disabled.

The program recently came under attack in a blog post from Christian musician Shaun Groves, who was upset that LifeWay was willing to warn customers about a book but still continued to sell it.

The label read: "Read with Discernment. This book may contain thoughts, ideas, or concepts that could be considered inconsistent with historical evangelical theology. Therefore we encourage you to read it with extra discernment."

LifeWay, the official publisher and bookstore of the Southern Baptist Convention, downplayed the program and the decision to end it, saying the labels were not warnings but rather an attempt to provide customers with more information.

"They were not warnings; there is no way at all you could read those as warnings," Rodgers said. "The program has been called controversial, [but] the only real controversy was the Groves blog."

Some authors of the marked books, including popular writers Rob Bell, Donald Miller, Brian McLaren and William Young, were pleased with the decision to terminate the program.

Brian McLaren, a sometimes controversial emergent author whose books were flagged, said a decision to censor writings by another Christian went against the Baptist tradition of personal conscience. "I think it is concerning especially when a Baptist bookstore acts as if a central organization can make decisions on which books are accepted and rejected," McLaren said. "Yes, I am very pleased [to see it ended]."

Young, who wrote the *New York Times* best seller *The Shack*, said he wasn't bothered by the program but still thought that LifeWay made "a good move" in ending it. —Richard Yeakley, RNS

Catholic bishops remove 'booty' from the Bible

Catholic bishops have kicked the "booty" out of the Bible. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has brought about a new translation of the Bible, one it says is more accurate, more accessible and more poetic.

Booty, a word that sets off snickers in Sunday school, has been replaced by *spoils of war* in the newest edition of the New American Bible, the English-language Catholic Bible.

"We needed a new translation because English is a living language," says retired auxiliary bishop of Milwaukee Richard Sklba, part of the NAB review and editing team. The new version, updated from the 1970 edition, was published March 9.

While Catholics may read from any of two dozen English translations, the New American Bible is the one used by U.S. bishops for prayer and study. It can take decades for the Vatican to approve the scriptures to be read during mass.

One change that may set off alarms with traditionalists is in a passage that many Christians believe foreshadows the coming of Christ and his birth to a virgin. The 1970 version of Isaiah 7:14 says "the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

The new text refers instead to "the young woman," as is the case also with the New Revised Standard Version

Bible. The Hebrew word *almah* may or may not signify a virgin, the NAB explains. Some other changes:

- The 1970s version of the 23rd Psalm—"even when I walk through a dark valley"—becomes a "walk through the valley of the shadow of death."
- Proverbs 31:10, an ode to "The Ideal Wife," is now a "Poem on the Woman of Worth."

"Women will like this: being measured by their own accomplishments, not in terms of a husband's perspective," says Mary Elizabeth Sperry of the bishops' organization. "Some people will be gravely distressed and others will be absolutely ecstatic and some will just say, 'I liked it the old way.'"

—Cathy Lynn Grossman, *USA Today/RNS*

Christians in Pakistan chilled by assassination

Christian schools and colleges across Pakistan shut down for three days to protest the March 2 assassination in Islamabad of Shahbaz Bhatti, a Roman Catholic who was minister for religious minorities. Christians and secular groups marched in the cities of Lahore, Karachi, Hyderabad and Faisalabad to protest the killing.

The call for action came at an ecumenical meeting chaired by Archbishop Lawrence Saldana, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan. In a press statement, church leaders said that if Pakistan "becomes a killing field" of people "who exercise their freedom of conscience and expression," then "criminals trying to take charge of the country" will be emboldened.

Bhatti, 42, was ambushed and shot dead as he was being driven to his office. He was a critic of Pakistan's blasphemy law, which makes criticism of the Prophet Muhammad a capital crime in the Muslim-majority nation.

Last November, Bhatti initiated a clemency petition for Asia Bibi, a Christian woman currently in prison on blasphemy charges. "My life is under threat. I am getting threat calls regular-

ly," Bhatti said at the end of a telephone interview November 22. On January 4, another high-ranking government figure, Punjab governor Salman Taseer, was killed after he criticized the blasphemy law.

"We salute the courage of Shahbaz who knowingly put his life in danger by speaking up boldly against the blasphemy law," said Archbishop Saldana. "We decided to close all the institutions to honor his sacrifice."

Victor Azariah, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, said in a telephone interview that "words cannot describe our feelings" at the news of Bhatti's killing. "We are stunned."

In New York, the Islamic Society of North America said it was "outraged" by the killing.

World leaders, including President Barack Obama, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, British Prime Minister David Cameron and Pope Benedict XVI, paid tribute to Bhatti.

Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, in a letter to the prime minister of Pakistan called the crime "heinous and outrageous." Calling for protection of religious minorities, Tveit said, "Extremists will stop at nothing in their desperate attempt to force religious extremism and violence on Pakistani society."

—Anto Akkara, ENInews

Anglican bishop fights Israel's denial of visa

Suheil Dawani, the Anglican bishop in Jerusalem, has gone to court to seek a renewal of the Israeli residency permit that allows him to live and work in the ancient city. The Israeli government recently declined to renew the permit and ordered Dawani and his family to leave the country.

Dawani was elected head of the Episcopal diocese in 2007. He was able to renew his visa in 2008 and 2009. But he was informed in writing last August by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior that it declined to renew the permit.

According to a news release March 3 from Dawani's office, the letter from the ministry said that "Bishop Suheil acted with the Palestinian Authority in transferring lands owned by Jewish people to the Palestinians and also helped to register lands of Jewish people in the name of the church." Further allegations said that documents were forged by the bishop.

Dawani said he denied all the accusations but received no response from the ministry. A second letter from the bishop requested documents or evidence of the charges, but it also went unanswered. "Bishop Dawani attempted to resolve this with restraint and without causing the government of Israel any embarrassment. The lack of resolution . . . required Bishop Dawani to seek legal counsel," according to the news release.

Previously, all Anglican bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem who have not held Israeli citizenship have been granted residency permits to allow them to live in Jerusalem where the bishop's residence, diocesan offices and cathedral are located.

After the denial last year, a number of religious leaders, including Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, advocated for Dawani with the Israeli government. Diplomatic efforts through British and U.S. offices were unable to learn the source of the allegations.

Israel's Ministry of the Interior, replying to a question from ENInews, on March 3 said: "We are talking about a sensitive issue that was presented in front of the Interior Minister, and our detailed answer will be delivered in the court, in the frame of the petition that was served."

An Israeli official, who asked not to be identified, told ENInews March 2 that the legal issues were "very serious" and would be dealt with in court. The official also said Dawani had been offered a different status, similar to a work permit, but he rejected it. The diocesan news release did not address that point and noted that Dawani "is awaiting a court date to be assigned." —ENInews

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, April 10

John 11:1-45

AS A JOHN SCHOLAR, I have always been fascinated with the scribal confusion about Jesus' "I AM" statement: "I am the resurrection and the life." Some of the ancient manuscripts for the Gospel of John omit "and the life," with the assumption that this is a redundancy and that no self-respecting Jesus would repeat himself. This is Martha's misunderstanding, isn't it? When Jesus says to her, "Your brother will rise again," she hears only the promise of a future resurrection: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." But Jesus then seems to correct this misunderstanding. "I am the resurrection and the life," he insists. We might ask Jesus, as did the scribes who corrected him, what's the difference?

The chapter itself is structured with this misunderstanding in mind. The raising of Lazarus is the last of Jesus' signs in John's Gospel, with the actual raising of Lazarus narrated in only two verses. There is a repeated pattern in the fourth Gospel: a sign, which is followed by dialogue among the bystanders and then a discourse by Jesus that interprets the sign (see 5:1-47; 9:1-10:21). Note that in this Gospel, Jesus does not perform miracles but instead does "signs." Signs point to things. The miracle itself is not the point, as wonderful as it is—the point is what is revealed about Jesus and who Jesus is.

In the raising of Lazarus, the pattern is reversed. The dialogue and Jesus' discourse occur before the sign is performed. Why in this case does the interpretation of the sign come first? Why does Jesus comment on the sign before raising Lazarus from the dead? Is it because Jesus knows that his action will be misinterpreted, even by those who are closest to him, even by those who actually believe? Could it be that the sign's meaning is more important than the miracle itself, even more important than raising someone from the dead?

In the Gospel of John, the raising of Lazarus is the cause of Jesus' death. In the Synoptic Gospels, the cleansing of the temple is the impulsion for the plot to kill Jesus (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47-48). But now the temple scene has been moved to the beginning of the Gospel, where it follows the wedding at Cana, and it is the raising of Lazarus to life that incites those who are plotting Jesus' arrest and death. In John 11:46-57, the chief priests and the Pharisees are told what Jesus did and "from that day on they planned to put him to death." Wanting to get rid of the evidence as well, the chief priests plan to put Lazarus to death "since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were

deserting and were believing in Jesus" (12:9-11). It is Jesus' claim, "I am the resurrection and the life," that provokes them.

Again, we should ask why Jesus needs to explain what the raising of Lazarus means before he raises him. Is it because the sign would be easily misunderstood and misinterpreted, even by us? When we think about the raising of Lazarus, do we place our focus on "I am the resurrection" alone and forget that Jesus also says, "I am the life"? Do we too quickly jump to the security of eternal life, imagining our future residence in heaven (14:2-3) rather than the provision of life in the present?

Jesus interprets this one last sign for us because the answers to all of these questions are a resounding yes. Like Martha, we encapsulate resurrection as only future salvific existence and not as the possibility of life right here, right now, with Jesus. Yet for Lazarus, the Gospel describes not his future with Jesus but his life in the present. In chapter 12 the anointing of Jesus takes place at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha in Bethany. We are told that Martha serves and Mary anoints Jesus, and Lazarus, whom Jesus has raised from the dead, "was one of those at the table with him," just as the Beloved Disciple will be when he is first introduced at the foot washing. That Lazarus is raised to life is his secure promise that Jesus will prepare an abiding place for him, but it is also the reality of new life with

We need to hear Jesus' own interpretation of his resurrection.

Jesus now. This new life is leaning on the breast of Jesus, reclining at the table with him, sharing food and fellowship. New life in Jesus is this intimacy, this closeness; it is not just the death of Jesus but also the life of Jesus that brings salvation. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, through which "we have all received grace upon grace."

Jesus breaks his pattern because in the end he was not sent into the world for eternal life alone. The Word become flesh means life right here and right now, everything that "grace upon grace" can mean. The entirety of the Gospel of John shows us what that life looks like, feels like, tastes like, smells like and sounds like. The raising of Lazarus on the last Sunday of Lent breaks our patterns so that we can hear for ourselves what Jesus' resurrection can mean. We need to hear his interpretation of his resurrection. Otherwise we may misunderstand Easter. Easter is our promise of eternal life in the presence of Jesus and the Father; at the same time it is the daily grace of life in Jesus' abiding presence.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, April 17
Matthew 21:1-11

WHEN HE ENTERED Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

This is how Matthew’s version of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem ends. Palm Sunday answers the crowds’ question by declaring that Jesus is worthy of praise and worship. He is the King of Kings, the promised king, one who rivals Herod, the one whom the wise men visit, whose lineage can be traced back through the Davidic line to Abraham. Jesus is worthy of a grand entrance and of being the object of exaltation and glorification.

But although Palm Sunday used to be one of the major celebratory Sundays of the church year, with real palm branches waved by children ushering in our King, today it has almost been forgotten. Over time this celebration has given way to an emphasis on the somber reality of Passion Sunday, with a few palms thrown in for good measure. While there are good reasons for a dichotomous festival that bridges Palm Sunday and Holy Week, there are also good reasons for restoring Palm Sunday to its rightful liturgical place. After five Sundays of Lent and with the expectations of the week ahead, we could use a little revelry, a little pomp and circumstance, on Palm Sunday.

I don’t mean to ignore reality or gloss over the events of Holy Week just because they are depressing. Rather, I want to propose that celebrating Palm Sunday can witness to our belief that the Jesus who will die on Good Friday is indeed the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah. The thing about Matthew is that Palm Sunday really works for this Gospel. Of course, there is the amusing detail in Matthew of Jesus riding on both a colt *and* a donkey. (Dear Matthew is all about the fulfillment of prophecy and trying to get his traditions right.) Of the four Gospel writers, it is Matthew whose portrait of Jesus as king is perhaps the most developed. Here is a Jesus who is immediately perceived as a threat to the throne, a danger to the established powers.

There is something quite poignant in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem as told in the first Gospel. The waving of palms, the scattering of cloaks upon the ground, the shouts of “Hosanna” are very public, unguarded and exposed expressions of belief. They’re out there for the whole world to see, perhaps as much as the crosses on foreheads that began this season. Why is it that we publicly profess the suffering of the

cross without hesitation but cannot easily express our praise and worship of the King of Kings? Have we liturgically endorsed suffering over celebration, affliction over adoration, even death over life? Have we tipped the scales to focus more on the ways in which the world tried to rid itself of Immanuel, *God with us*, rather than the means by which God’s people continually witness to God’s presence *among us*?

The misunderstanding is that Palm Sunday is simply a Sunday of adulation. This is not true. Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is just that—the arrival in the city where his fate will be decided and his future determined. To what extent might an emphasis on our celebration of Palm Sunday hold in tension God’s reality and the world’s reality? Might Palm Sunday be the occasion for suspense, not with the naive notion that we don’t know what will happen, but with the acknowledgment of the tension within ourselves—that the Christ in whom we believe is the Jesus who died on a cross? Perhaps Palm Sunday can recapture the confession that we all must make at one time in our lives of faith: we can kill the King of the Jews, but we cannot take away his sovereignty. His governance has ushered in a reign where those who are blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

We can kill the King of the Jews, but we cannot take away his sovereignty.

Palm Sunday could be a moment of faith that happens too infrequently—a moment when we are allowed to feel the colliding of worlds and to experience a synchronization of who we think Jesus is and who God wants Jesus to be. It could be a moment when we sense, albeit only momentarily, not only that Jesus is worthy of our praise but also that our worship is integral to our relationship with him.

On Palm Sunday we can answer the question, “Who is this?” The remaining week in Lent will give us many ways to reflect on our reply—he is the suffering Messiah, the one who was crucified for me, the one who died for my sins. But on Palm Sunday we answer, “This is the King of Israel,” my king, whose reign has not and will not be like the reign that is brought to light this week, and whose glory will conquer that which tries to crucify it.

The author is Karoline Lewis, who teaches biblical preaching at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

On the road with Luther

Here I walk

by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

MARTIN LUTHER was not a fan of pilgrimages. I mean *really* not a fan. Peruse the references in the index to *Luther's Works* in English and you will find, one after another, the reformer's tirades against pilgrimages and a whole host of other evils attributed to the papacy and its deformed theology: indulgences, invocations of saints, monastic vows, feast days and fast days—the whole shebang. On rare occasions, Luther acknowledges that the pilgrimages of the patriarchs were blessed acts because they were done “with obedience to God.” But apparently there was no such thing as an obedient-to-God pilgrimage by the early 16th century. As Luther poses it: “What are we to give to God in return for this love? Nothing. You shall not go to Rome on pilgrimages.”

I'm Lutheran, and I went to Rome on pilgrimage.

Does this shocking defiance of the beloved reformer suggest first steps toward conversion Tiber-wise or profound doubt about the state of my soul? None of the above. Luther concludes the above quote by saying: “Only believe in Christ, cast off your old nature, and cleave to Him. Your faith, however, must be of the sort that abounds in good works.” It is under the rubric of “good works” that my husband, Andrew, and I hoped the pilgrimage might qualify.

The idea started to germinate five or six years ago. Andrew and I were in graduate school and noticed that 2010 would mark the 500th anniversary of Luther's 1,000-mile pilgrimage (undertaken in his pre-reformer days) from his Augustinian priory in Erfurt to Rome. Being keen hikers and Lutherans, we thought it would be fun to re-create his trip. Fun didn't get us very far, however, in either inspiration or funding. It would take a few more years to find a reason and a sponsor.

Both emerged when I came to work at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France—an almost 50-year-old outfit devoted to the scholarly side of the Lutheran World Federation's ecumenical task. I admit I had little interest in ecumenism, scholarly or otherwise, before I took the job. It wasn't that I had any doubts about the true Christianness of non-Lutheran Christians. Ecumenism just seemed to be either a zero-sum competition between theological traditions played out like a polite game of manners, a milquetoast dissolution into lowest-common-denominator theology or politically impressive pulpit-and-altar agreements that had little purchase on the ground. But I also had to face the troubling fact that antiecumenical Christians need the rejected other, parasitically, to vindicate their own claims. One way or another, I had no

idea how rich, varied, complicated and sophisticated the past hundred years of ecumenical work and thought have been.

With other Luther anniversaries looming ahead, most significantly 2017 as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation itself, the question of what it might mean to celebrate or commemorate Luther began to press on this newborn ecumenist more urgently. Even the choice of 2017 is complicated: it's Luther's posting of the 95 theses that took place 500 years earlier, an event often used ideologically to undergird an image of Luther as the first great challenger of authority. While Luther

In pilgrim life, every encounter is infused with meaning.

did object to indulgences on theological grounds, the choice of this event focuses on his negative criticisms, not the positive content of his joyful teaching on justification by faith. This focus also conveniently turns a blind eye to the devastating set of events that followed—devastating no matter which side of the theological divide one falls on. How might we “celebrate” the division of the church that occurred half a millennium ago, especially after 50 years of progressive bilateral dialogues between Catholics and the whole range of Protestants?

Out of this complex set of questions, our project “Here I Walk: An Ecumenical Pilgrimage” was born. It can be facile to compare one era to another, but there is at least one genuine commonality between Luther's early 16th century and our early 21st century: we're both in the midst of a dramatic communications revolution. So with a nod to the printing press, Andrew and I decided to combine the oldest form of transportation—feet—with the newest form of communication—social media on the Internet.

Other pious fans of Luther have re-created his pilgrimage in recent years, but we did it “plugged in,” by recording our progress on a blog (hereiwalk.org), collecting fans on Facebook and updating via Twitter. We invited a virtual community of pilgrims to follow along with us in the quest for reconcilia-

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson is assistant research professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, and editor of Lutheran Forum.



ON THE ROAD: “Our physical goal was Rome, but our real goal was a church healed of its divisions.”

tion between Lutherans and Catholics. Alongside photos and a daily report, we interspersed our blog feed with snippets from texts of Luther, bilateral dialogues, Catholic theology, interviews and minicourses in church history and ecumenism. In the end we had over 800 Facebook followers, more than a thousand visitors to the site and some beautiful words of thanks from people to whom the project meant something, married Catholic-Lutheran couples in particular.

In Protestant Europe these days there's a general revival of interest in pilgrimage. Three pastors of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland are called not to parish ministry but to “pilgrim ministry,” and the Church of Norway is busy redeveloping the ancient pilgrim route between Oslo and Trondheim. This could be a preference for “spirituality” over “religion” and longing for “practices” without any “doctrine” to interfere. It could be a betrayal of Luther's strong words against pilgrimage. But for Luther, of course, pilgrimages were inextricable from the quest for indulgences, which is obviously not a feature of contemporary Protestant pilgrimage. He wanted to see Christians serving their neighbors at home, not going off to exotic locales in evasion of their callings.

This otherwise sage insight had its downside. Among other things, pilgrimages were one of the few ways that women could legitimately travel and expand their own horizons. Maybe in Luther's day the sheerly local perspective was a legitimate corrective to social irresponsibility, but nowadays in the global village it's the refusal to see the rest of the world that is the irresponsible act.

In a technical sense, our pilgrimage wasn't really a pilgrim-

age anyway. The point of a pilgrimage is to reach a holy destination, usually in a state of repentance, in order to gain the benefit conferred by the site. Our physical goal was Rome, but our real goal was more ethereal: a church healed of its divisions. But the means was the same, and by the end it was clear to me why pilgrimage has been such an important spiritual practice in the history of the church.

At home you can usually fool yourself into thinking you're master of your own destiny, safe and in control. Dodging distracted drivers on an Italian superstrada without a lane or shoulder for pedestrians dispels that illusion quickly. At home you can medicate the least discomfort with pillows and TV; not so in three weeks of German rain. At home you can wait for the good weather before going for an outing at your leisure, but when you get caught in the first snowstorm of the year in the Alps, you have to find a way to compromise. Pilgrimage is not about getting your own way, being comfortable or staying in control.

But it is about prayer. I prayed more in those 70 days than I ever have in my life. I recognized that I needed to be praying that much all the time, even at home; but it's the vulnerability of life on foot that exposes the need. Alongside our frequent and fervent prayers for sheer preservation, we found ourselves praying more for other people too. The sister of a friend diagnosed with ovarian cancer at the beginning of our pilgrimage—for whom we prayed daily—was completely healed of it by the end; that was a joyous spiritual victory. On countless occasions a bad start to the day was transformed by our reciting of morning prayer.

Given the intensity of the pilgrimage experience itself, we

thought it odd at first that Luther said so little about it. Here and there he describes the places he visited, but the effort of walking a thousand miles each way in a friar's robes and sandals during a particularly harsh winter goes unmentioned. Our theory now is that his life as an Augustinian hermit was already so uncomfortable and so much in search of the mercy of God that life on the road wasn't substantially different.

What Andrew and I found is that you *can* serve and be served by your neighbor while on the pilgrim trail. I came to realize that in ordinary life, people filter through your day and are incidental if not annoying; but in pilgrimage life, every

meeting is infused with meaning. The people in our path were visitations, not coincidences.

Some of them needed something from us. Certainly many of the pilgrims on Europe's ancient paths are secular or doubtful post-Christians, perhaps seeking faith and perhaps not even capable of admitting that they are. An American visitor went out of his way to join our walk and honored us by talking through his vocational questions with us during the course of our day together. Once we shared a beer with an elderly mute Italian who passed the slow and lonely hours of the day leaning against his garage. We couldn't offer anything but our physical company—and that was enough. Our virtual companions for the journey made our blog distinctive among the millions on the Internet by their unfailingly positive, constructive and respectful comments—in part, I like to think, because of the positive, constructive and respectful tone in which our own offerings were made. A civilized Internet conversation on theology is a rare bird indeed.

As we served others, others served us, refreshing and strengthening us when we started to droop. Once we failed to make a reservation for a Sunday night that was the first night of a town's local concert series. We couldn't find a room at any of the inns. Having little choice but lots of prayer, we presented ourselves in church that morning and asked for mercy. A congregant took us home, talked to his wife and then offered their spare room—complete with a live Bach piano concert, a genuine Bavarian *Brotzeit* supper and a hiking map for the next day.

Another time we had a comedy of errors trying to find the right route through the Alps, which might have become a tragedy as we prepared at four in the afternoon to plunge down a trail that, as it turns out, was high and remote—as well as a dead end. The wonderfully named Trudi and Gaudenzio, just returning from a day of mushroom picking, refused to let us go on alone and finally gave us a ride to our destination. That was the point at which the unbroken chain of steps from Erfurt to Rome snapped, but when God sends angels to rescue you from certain harm, you don't refuse their help.

Even if we hadn't broken the chain then, we would have two days later, when the first snowstorm of the year struck, burying Septimer Pass in piles of

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AT ROTHENBURG: A visit to St. Jacob's Lutheran Church.

snow and reducing visibility to zero. We took a bus—how unromantic, how unexciting, how un-Luther—across the border to the Italian city of Chiavenna. The family whose bed-and-breakfast we stayed at was so delighted with our project, despite being the most pious Catholics we met in all of Italy, that they invited us to dinner that night and shared an abundance of local specialties.

The funny thing about our technologically interconnected, social-media world is that it is still full of strangers. We are nervous about those unaccounted for by bureaucratic means, fearful of what might be lurking behind that face, unable to comprehend the universe of emotion and experience in every person. Between our expectations of a comprehensive social network and our suspicion of terrorists around every corner, real hospitality to the true stranger and sojourner is risky business. As it turns out, the chance to serve us was a gift that we as pilgrims could offer to others. Pilgrims are good strangers. They break down the barriers of an identity-card society. Nobody asked to see our passports: our sunburns and backpacks were credentials enough, and the generosity showed to us was great. As one of our readers put it, we were entertained by angels unawares.

As pilgrims we partook in the joyful exchange that, as Luther himself said, characterizes the Christian life. Who knows? Maybe our dear reformer was praying for us as we followed in his footsteps. CC

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Missing the signs

by Bradley N. Hill

WE'VE ALL SEEN classic signs outside eateries. One might have a giant arrow, outlined by lightbulbs, pointing at the restaurant (sometimes some of the bulbs are missing or burned out). Plastic letters form words like "Eat at Joe's" or "Good Eats" or "Free Fries with Burger."

The proprietor believes that people will drive by, see the sign and be enticed to come in and spend their money. Occasionally he changes the words to announce a Wednesday special or a featured flavor. But if someone were to ask him, he probably couldn't verify whether anybody ever stopped and came in because of the sign.

Behind this viewpoint is a conviction—one that is largely unspoken. The proprietor believes with all his heart that he is offering something that people really want and need and that if they would only see the sign and come in and taste his burgers they would be satisfied.

For Christmas he adds a border of alternating red and green lightbulbs. For Halloween he uses black lights and strobes. He tries moving the sign closer to the road and uses larger letters so it will be easier to read.

Then one day a truck stops and the driver comes in.

"Joe? Saw your sign out front and thought I'd try your burger."

At last! Joe has hard evidence that the sign works. That sign is now there to stay—no one will ever persuade him to take it down. Joe tells the story over and over to his family.

Over the ensuing years, Joe has trouble making ends meet. Eventually he closes the restaurant. As he locks up and walks away he notices that the sign out front is still on. He walks over and unplugs it. The sign goes dark. He pauses and thinks, "Thanks to the sign, we hung on a little longer." He removes a bulb as a souvenir and leaves.

I served a church that had that sign out front. It didn't advertise burgers, but it did advertise bake sales and dramas, Christmas pageants, Halloween alternatives, concerts, worship services and prayer meetings. The members believed that if people would just see the sign and come in, they would find their spiritual needs met. Occasionally they repositioned the sign. Once they changed the size of the letters. Sure enough, a neighbor came in one day because of the sign.

"That damn sign makes it hard to see the oncoming traffic!" he said. "Can you move it away from the road?"

Almost all churches have the equivalent of Eat at Joe's signs.

The signs may not be made with plastic letters, but they're doing the same job. Yellow page ads. Community zip code mailings. Posters in shopping malls. Electronic reader boards out front. And now churches are scrambling to make sure they have sparkling websites, blogs and Facebook pages. Yes, there is good information there, but the central idea is the same: advertise religious services so that people will stop, look, come in and taste what is good. In other words, our congregational world-view is the same as Joe's view of the restaurant business.

These signs are imperative in nature. They command us to eat here and not there. They illuminate the one way to get to the food.

The Eat at Joe's sign represents an attractional view of church, a view that attempts to persuade people to act in a cer-

Gen Y does not even notice the church's programs, flyers or radio spots.

tain way. It is also centripetal in nature—an effort to funnel people from the surrounding community into the church where they will discover, Lord willing, the desires of their hearts. "If only we had better banners on the walls, . . . if only the music were more relevant and the preaching were done more conversationally. . . . If only the coffee shop offered espresso and the PowerPoint presentations were animated . . . then people would see us, stop and enter—and of course they'd stay."

Occasionally the attractional approach works. Many of us have a story about someone who stopped, looked, listened and came in. That person is now chair of the church council. But there's a danger here: when a story becomes an anecdote to justify a strategy, it soon becomes a deterrent to congregational efforts at becoming truly missional. The few who are attracted by the sign reinforce the church's behavior. They are like pigeons pecking on a lever that rarely rewards them with a grain—but all it takes is one grain in a thousand pecks for them to keep pecking at that lever.

The youth of the church where I serve as interim pastor invit-

Bradley N. Hill is a minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

ed me to talk with them about various issues. (By the way, the older a church is, the broader the term *youth* becomes. Youth at this church includes everyone from junior high through college.) The main question on their minds was, "Why is everything funneled into the church? Why isn't the church going out *there*?" I answered, "Because we want to engage society on our terms, not theirs." (Full disclosure: I had been told ahead of time that this issue might be on their minds.)

Almost every Western church is lacking one or two generations—members of Gen Y, known also as millennials, echo boomers and the Net generation, those born between 1976 and 2000. (See *The American Church in Crisis*, by David T. Olson, or a recent Barna report.) The usual assurance is that "they will come back to the church when they get married and have babies." But this line is heard less and less frequently—for one simple reason: it's not true. As Douglas Coupland says, "This is the first generation raised without God." So there is nothing for this generation to return to.

Extensive data on church attendance and Gen Y reveal an unmistakable trend: disengagement with the institutions of Christianity. The *Christian Science Monitor* featured an article announcing the "coming evangelical collapse." Within two generations, the article predicts, evangelicalism will diminish by half. In 2009, *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham declared the end of Christian America, and in *The Bridger Generation*, author Thom Rainer says that the number of Gen Y members who "reached for Christ" is about 4 percent.

Everyone is eager to add that Gen Y is very spiritual. Gen Yers tell us that it's not Christ they object to but the church that—arrogantly, in their minds—claims that it's his church.

In *American Grace*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell present data and conclusions that support this description. They report that church attendance by the 18- to 28-year-olds has dropped off dramatically since the mid-1950s. "Among twentysomethings the rate of decline in church attendance was more than twice the national average. . . . It is hard to imagine a more clearly defined generational phenomenon." They also report that 30 percent of twentysomethings call themselves "nones," or those with "no religious affiliation." (Only 5 to 7 percent of preboomers identify themselves as "nones," and only 15 percent of boomers.) "Nor is there any evidence . . . that as the younger generations age, they are becoming more attached to organized religion." The good news (or not so bad news) is that the new nones are "not uniformly unbelievers, and few of them claim to be atheists or agnostics. Indeed, most of them express some belief in God."

The result, in any case, is that the church has few if any Gen Yers. Why? There are many complex and overlapping reasons for their absence. Here are four of them.

First, Gen Y does not even notice our Eat at Joe's signs. For them, an advertisement is just part of the background white noise of our culture. No impersonal website or advertisement, no program or event flyer, poster or radio spot will entice an unchurched, secular, raised-without-God Gen Yer into church. No matter how amped-up and cutting edge our promos, these young adults are not likely to notice our attractional evangelism, and if they do notice it, they will just go on by. They are technologically savvy but "Teflon-coated." Most are not tuned into Christian radio or familiar with the top 100 songs on CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) lists. Even the youth in my church don't listen to Christian radio. They are intensely relational but impervious to anything they see as a sales pitch.

Second, friends are the final factor. In some ways this reality is not dissimilar from what I experienced in working with groups and tribal cultures in Africa. Though on occasion an African may break from the clan and form an alliance with a church, this rarely happens. More often, whole families and clans move together into the church. The attractional model, in contrast, is individualistic. It seeks to lure the single driver who passes on his or her way to work. This won't work with Gen Y;

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the only way to reach these young people is to be with them, to enter into genuine spiritual friendships and allow the flow to follow the natural terrain to Christ and, we hope and pray, to his church. Of course, if one establishes relationships with several of them, one may find oneself admitted to a whole new crowd of friends!

Third, Gen Yers are suspicious of metanarratives, those stories that seek to give universal meaning and purpose to existence. For them, metanarrative is a mask for an agenda of power, self-legitimization and coercion. In the same way, they are highly suspicious of church invitations. They think: "The church is offering a free rock concert, but it is after something else." Or as one said to me, "Your church is offering a tutoring program only as a means to convert us." They're right. We in the church are always asking ourselves, "How can we get them in here?" and devising endless plots and schemes to do so. One church I served sponsored a Halloween maze event. It was a huge success in that a thousand kids went through the maze, saw the cool evangelistic video and received the brochure at the end. I venture to say they all knew this was going to happen and opted to tolerate the pitch in order to enjoy the maze. Their force shields were up—and as far as I know not one of them connected with the church because of the maze.

Fourth and last, Gen Yers fail to see the relevance. They think they know what "Joe" is offering, and they don't particu-

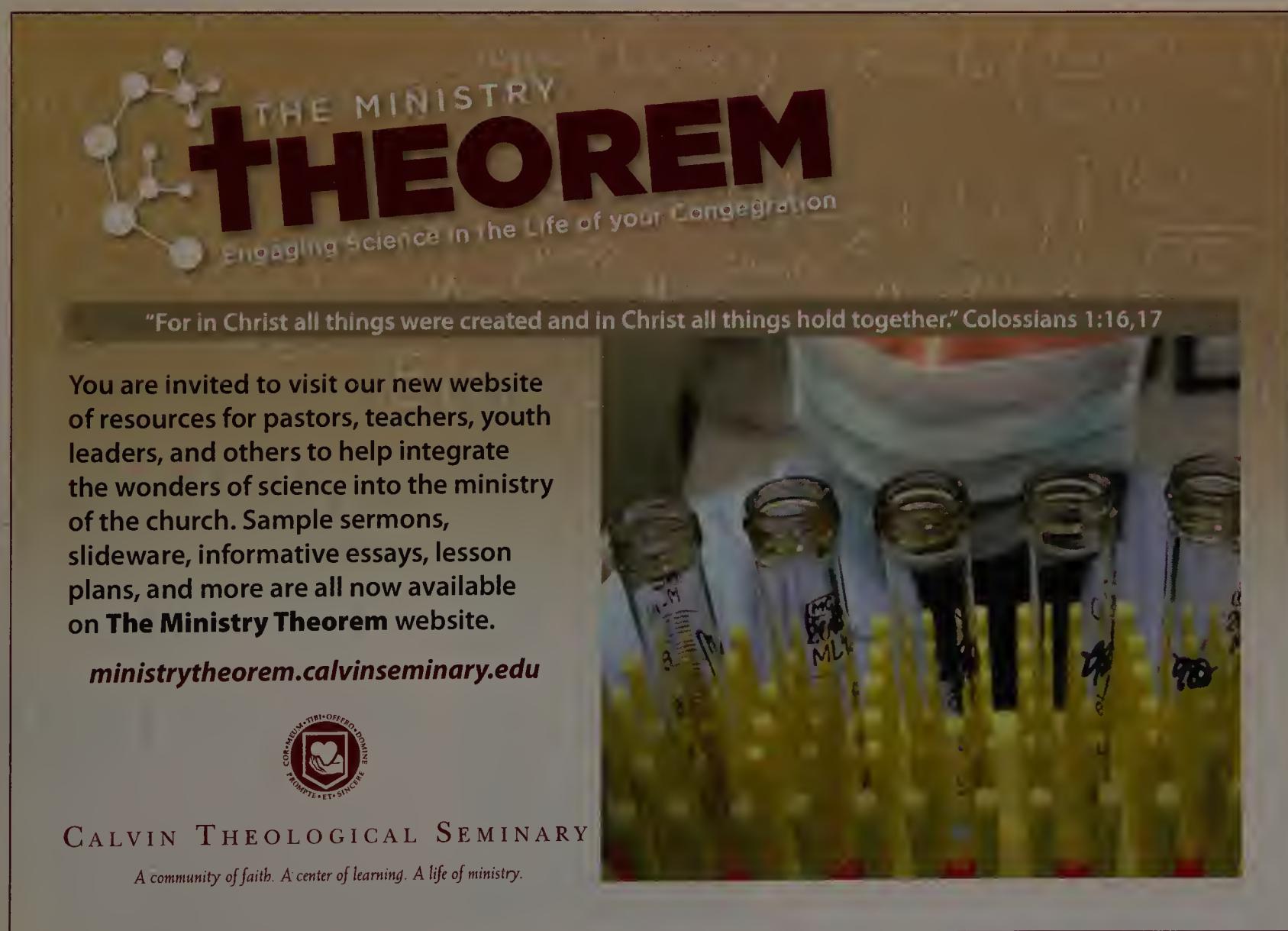
larly like Christian burgers. They live in a world of pluralism, relativism, quantum theory, chaos theory, evolution, diversity, choice, energy and auras, karma and dharma, self-definition, social and environmental concern. Impervious to pitches, tribal, suspicious—when you think about it, it's not their absence that is surprising but the fact that any of them are present at all.

Many of the qualities I've described are qualities that we should applaud. We moderns have been all too gullible when it

Young people easily detect a sales pitch.

comes to story lines. We are too individualistic, too mechanistic and too content to live within closed systems. We have sought to "bring them in" and get them to be like us when Christ's clear mandate is to "go out there" and be like Christ. Who knows what new wineskins will be required, whether it be emergent church, "liquid" church, house church or some form of ancient/future church.

One couple got it. In the heart of Ann Arbor, Michigan, they gave up on the "eat here" sign and went "out there"—opening up space in an old bar, posting flyers and setting up a sandwich



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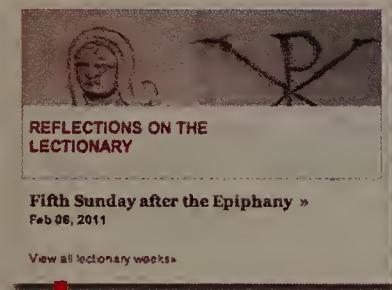
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board (back to low tech!) with an invitation to conversation scheduled for a Sunday afternoon because some of the people they hoped to reach might be hung over in the morning. A topic was posted, which changed weekly: peace, sex, anxiety, politics, the environment. A crowd began to gather, drawn by the idea of stimulating and spiritual conversation with strangers and neighbors. It was no secret that Jeremy, the facilitator, was a Christian, and folks naturally began to ask him what Christians believed about the week's topic. Jeremy would lead the conversation—and only later share a biblical perspective on the topic.

The church exists primarily for those yet to know Christ.

The Sunday gatherings were called Kaioen—meaning “to burn within”—and this prechurch of inquisitive visitors began to burn with enthusiasm and curiosity. It also began to grow. People began to stay longer, moving from curiosity to inquiry to seeking. Some seekers became finders as they confessed faith in Christ Jesus and began to take communion.

Another alternative to the attractional approach was taken by Alive Covenant Church on Washington State's Olympic Peninsula. The church says, “No perfect people are allowed.” Alive Covenant calls itself a “personal, get your hands dirty kind of church,” and asks, “What will God do in and through you?” Members believe in redemption, relationship, getting hands dirty and having fun, and they've structured their services accordingly.

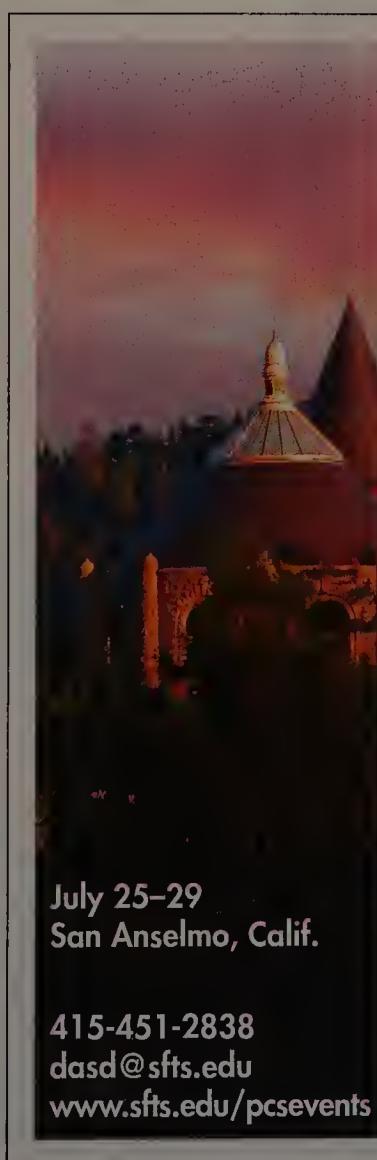
On the first Sunday evening of the month, members meet for combined worship, but for the rest of the month they gather in smaller groups in house churches. During the second week of the month, they study, discuss scripture and hang out. The third week each house church decides to assist someone in the surrounding community who needs help. The fourth week is about having fun—party time. People can become a part of the service project without being part of the larger church. Participants get the word out: “If you know of someone we can serve, please contact us.”

In Seattle, the Church of the Apostles is an “intentional eucharistic community.” Its “urban abbey” is a sanctuary and a brewery. Located in the art center of Seattle in the Fremont district, the members display art and

also offer “discernment groups” for people facing large life choices. A mission congregation of both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church, it subscribes to the Nicene Creed. Vicar Karen Ward writes that “serving the reign of God calls us to help God renew, restore, expand and enrich human community for all people, so there is something for everyone at the abbey: religious, nonreligious, agnostic, atheist, friends, neighbors, artists, dancers, DJs, filmmakers, yoga instructors, musicians, poets, kids, seniors, people of all races and cultures, everyone!”

Perhaps the place to start turning our signs around is with the Gen Yers who are still in churches. They are the ones to make the connections and the invitations. However, in *Almost Christian*, Kenda Dean warns that we have done “an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe; namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people focused primarily on ‘folks like us.’” Our link to Gen Yers may be even weaker than we think.

A critical question for any church is “for whom does the church primarily exist?” To the degree that the answer is “for those in the church,” the next generation is already lost. To the degree that the answer is “for those yet to know Christ,” there is hope. The turned-around sign then needs a new message. Instead of saying, “Eat at Joe's,” it will say, “Joe is asking, where do you want to eat? What do you want to eat? Let's talk.” **cc**



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Growing pains at the SBL

Scholars and believers

by John Dart

A FEW YEARS AGO, the world's largest body of biblical scholars adopted these words as a motto: "Foster biblical scholarship." Scholarship might seem an obvious focus for the Society of Biblical Literature, but as the SBL has grown in membership—it has seen a 30 percent increase since 2001—and added diverse scholarly approaches, tensions have simmered over the degree to which religious apologetics fits, if at all, into an organization devoted to critical research.

The issue bubbled to the surface last summer when Ronald Hendel, a professor of Hebrew Bible and Jewish studies at the University of California at Berkeley, wrote in a popular magazine that he was quitting the SBL. "The views of creationists, snake-handlers and faith-healers now count among the kinds of biblical scholarship that the society seeks to foster," wrote Hendel. While scholars tended to dismiss that claim as hyperbole, many agreed with Hendel that a "battle royal" is taking place in the SBL "between faith and reason."

The SBL put Hendel's column from the *Biblical Archaeology Review* on its website and invited member comments. Nearly 100 responses were posted, including replies from Hendel, before the online discussion was closed.

That debate was a tumultuous start for the SBL's new executive director, John Kutsko. Writing to SBL's 8,700 members in August, Kutsko acknowledged that Hendel "raised sincere concerns, widely shared in varying degrees." He also noted that the diversification of research may have prompted questions about whether an "intentional slippage of scholarly rigor" was afoot.

Kutsko, who holds a doctorate from Harvard in Hebrew Bible and previously worked for United Methodist-related Abingdon Press, added: "In regard to personal faith commitments consciously or unconsciously trumping critical inquiry, that has been a historic challenge in our field (how could it not be?)." SBL members typically teach at secular universities or at colleges and seminaries with ties to Protestant, Catholic or Jewish communities.

At the organization's annual meeting in November, which drew 4,800 registrants to downtown Atlanta, the SBL Council, a 14-member board, took some steps affirming the primacy of critical scholarship.



John Kutsko



John Dominic Crossan

The board placed more prominently on its website a vision statement that describes the SBL as "a learned society devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible from a variety of academic disciplines." Besides offering "intellectual growth and professional development," the statement says, the SBL strives to "advance the academic study of biblical literature and its cultural contexts." Kutsko said it was important to emphasize the words *critical* and *academic*. A longer procedure is required to alter the mission statement, "Foster biblical scholarship," but the board is expected to consider new wording at future meetings.

The board also elected John Dominic Crossan as SBL vice president for 2011 and president for 2012. A longtime SBL member and best-selling author, Crossan has been the leading voice of an independent group of scholars known as the Jesus Seminar.

The Jesus Seminar created controversy two decades ago when it declared that, in its scholarly judgment, less than 25 percent of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were actually uttered by him.

Crossan's friends said that by tapping him for the post, the SBL showed that it shares historical-critical standards of research with the Jesus Seminar and its parent, Westar Institute. Crossan retired early from DePaul University in 1995 to focus on writing and speaking. Crossan's election will continue a recent string of SBL presidents "clearly committed to critical scholarship," including the 2011 president, Carol Newsom of Emory University, said Stephen Patterson of Willamette University in Oregon. "What Crossan brings is a track record of public scholarship," he added.

The Westar Institute will hold its fall meeting this year in Berkeley—just before the SBL meeting in San Francisco—to launch a Bible seminar series that aims to counter religious conservatives by presenting a "more critical, informed and thoughtful approach to the Bible." The Westar Institute has not decided whether to hold its fall meetings in official conjunction with the SBL.

The SBL gatherings—which after a three-year hiatus will be held concurrently with the meetings of the American Academy of Religion—already attract special-interest "affiliate" groups.

Most participants stay for the SBL (and AAR) programs, at which they can choose from dozens of simultaneous research presentations, buy discounted books, interview for faculty vacancies and contact colleagues.

Evangelical and church-based scholars appear to find the scholarship at SBL meetings a fairly comfortable fit, especially for those who welcome the intellectual challenge.

"The SBL has provided space for Mennonite scholars and Friends to meet over the past 25 years," wrote Mary H. Schertz in her online response to Hendel's critique of the SBL. The annual meeting is "the exactly right venue to carry on the conversation about the interdependency of historical critical and confessional reading," she said. But in another online comment, Leo Perdue of Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas, wrote: "Some evangelicals are excellent scholars, but the radical true believers really bother me."

The Evangelical Theological Society, which for decades has met just before SBL's November meetings, has a clear doctrinal identity. The ETS, which had 623 registrants last year, regards the Bible as inerrant and declares on its website that it serves Jesus Christ and his church "by fostering conservative, evangelical biblical scholarship."

An evangelical group that drew more notice at the Atlanta meeting was the Institute for Biblical Research, which reported that 1,000 persons attended its closing session. The IBR had about only 30 members in 1975 but has grown rapidly lately.

The number of dues-paying members now nears 500 scholars, said president Lee McDonald in an e-mail. Some IBR members teach at schools such as Princeton, Yale, UCLA and Harvard and take part in SBL programs and committees, he said.

"While there may be some fairly conservative scholars who at times want to advance their missionary agendas at SBL meetings, I think these are few in number," McDonald said. "I can say without contradiction that most of us have been stretched in good ways by this relationship. I have learned more from those who challenged my assumptions than from those who shared them."

Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary, an IBR member, warned at a well-attended session on the historical Jesus in Atlanta that scholarship may be harmed when voices are excluded or ignored in the academic arena. "When detractors are consistently skeptical, this approach equates skepticism with thinking critically," Bock said, "when in fact thorough-going skepticism may be no more self-critical than thorough-going belief is." Such division "ultimately marginalizes the many scholars in the middle who might like to respectfully engage a broader spectrum," he said.

Cordial engagement was part of that session, at which Amy-Jill Levine of Vanderbilt University and Robert J. Miller, editor of the Jesus Seminar's *Fourth R* magazine, responded to papers by Bock and by two other evangelical professors.

Crossan, who a year ago joined Levine and Stephen



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Patterson in a panel discussion at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, said he advises scholars to set reasonable ground rules for debates. "I would prefer not to debate whether [a Gospel account] should be taken literally or metaphorically, because I won't change [another person's position] and they won't change [mine]," he said. In his debate in New Orleans with Anglican scholar N. T. Wright, Crossan noted that Wright "takes the resurrection of Jesus literally and I take it metaphorically"—in which case, Crossan suggested, the conversation should focus on comparing "what his understanding means for him and what mine means for me."



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Whatever the range of disagreements, some observers think that the percentage of conservative scholars in the SBL might increase as the SBL and the 10,000-member American Academy of Religion resume holding joint meetings this year and continuing through 2021.

After attending the separate AAR and SBL meetings last fall, Rodney Clapp wrote in his January 11 "Soundings" column for the *CENTURY* that "the center of gravity in publishing has arguably shifted to houses with evangelical bases or connections." The largest book-selling booths now belong to Eerdmans, InterVarsity Press, Baylor University Press and Baker Academic and Brazos Press, said Clapp, himself an editor at Baker and Brazos.

That trend is due partly to the increasing number of students from evangelical backgrounds who are doing doctoral studies at nonevangelical institutions, suggested Craig Keener, who teaches at American Baptist-related Palmer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

Keener cautioned in an interview that if the SBL were to create a litmus test

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designed to prohibit evangelicals from participation, that would hurt progressive evangelicals who already risk being faulted as "too liberal" by their conservative associates. "But I'd be surprised if that happened; litmus tests are more characteristic of fundamentalism," he said.

But a certain amount of regulation is required, Old Testament scholar John J. Collins of Yale wrote in a recent book, *Foster Biblical Scholarship*, which contains essays honoring Kent Richards, the longtime SBL executive director who retired last year. The quarterly *Journal of Biblical Literature* "is not a blog where anyone can post his or her own opinion," and program units at the annual meeting still need committee approval, he said. And Collins echoed some internal concerns about SBL's oversight of its print and online journal of book reviews.

"It is the essence of critical scholarship that no position is exempt from challenge if evidence and argument warrant it," said Collins, a past president of both the Catholic Biblical Association and the SBL. He said there has been "a resurgence of conservative believers who demand 'a hermeneutic of assent' to counteract the dominant hermeneutic of suspicion in biblical studies.

"It is not the business of the historical critic to disprove the supernaturalist interpretation [but] only to explain the events as far as possible in historical terms," Collins said. "The confidence of an earlier generation in the historicity of the exodus, or even the patriarchs, now seems to many to be a clear example of the distorting effect of the will to believe."

In that same vein, an article by a doctoral student published in the Winter 2010 *Journal of Biblical Literature* laments that the field of study on the empty tomb in the Gospel of Mark is "overgrown with faith-based scholarship." Richard C. Miller, a Ph.D. candidate at Claremont Graduate School, wrote that too often researchers seek to understand Mark's ending in terms of early Jewish beliefs about resurrection. He said resurrection was described in Jewish writings as a collective eschatological event, not as an event to exalt an individual.

"Most scholars have failed to classify properly how Mark's 'empty tomb' narrative would have registered in its

Mediterranean milieu," he wrote. Miller argued that the Gospel story ends with a missing body in a way that is similar to other ancient fables about hero-sages whose remains were not found—often confirming that the person was not a mere mortal. Miller, who holds master's degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School, was asked

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STRANGELY WARMED, STRANGELY FREE: JOHN WESLEY AND AMERICAN METHODISM



whether his *JBL* article might strike some readers as “combative.” Responding by e-mail, Miller said, “I am not against faith. I simply think that the Bible is deserving of a discursive space that handles its texts with the same measure of dignity accorded other great literary works of antiquity.”

Scholars often question whether accounts of the life of Jesus in the Gospels are historically accurate. Each Gospel storyteller “was far more interested in the theological significance carried by the story than in historical accuracy,” wrote L. Michael White of the University of Texas in his *Scripting Jesus: The Gospels in Rewrite*, published last year. In his book’s preface, White, an SBL board member, wrote that “the majority of New Testament scholars are, in fact, believing Christians,” some conservative and others not. The more skeptical scholars are not attacking Jesus or Christianity but are raising questions “as a direct result of taking the Gospels seriously,” he asserted.

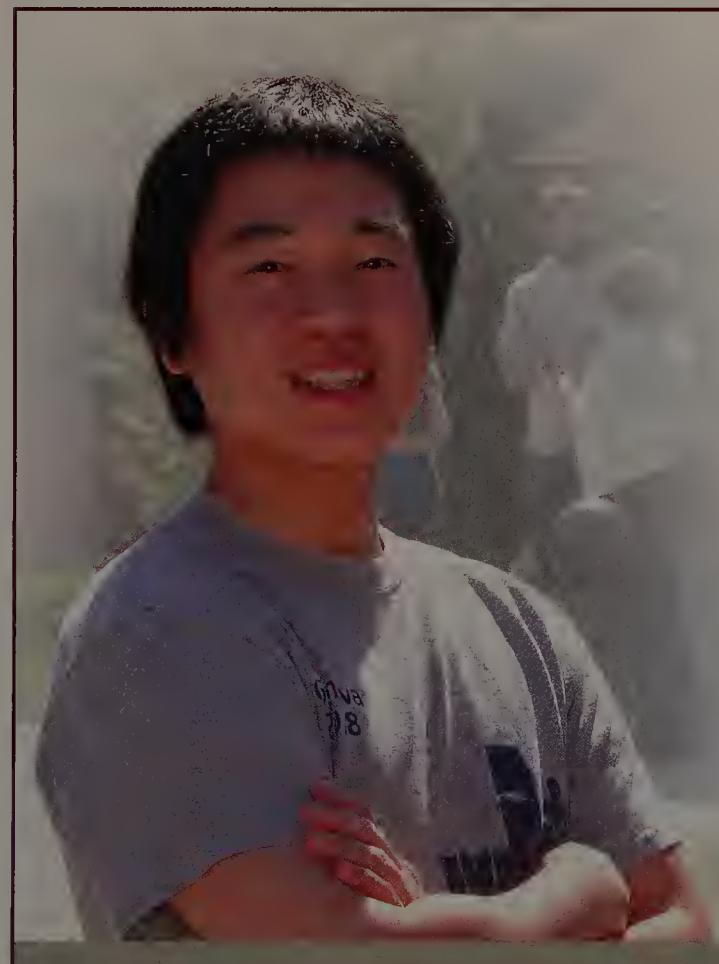
Current tensions within the SBL, which was founded in 1880, are stirred not only by liberal-conservative divisions but by the increasing diversity of voices. In his tenure as executive director of the SBL, Richards sought “more voices in the scholarly conversation, not fewer,” observed Gail O’Day, dean of Wake Forest University School

of Divinity. Student members were given a larger role, and a yearly international meeting overseas became well established through Richards’s determination, she wrote in the book honoring him.

“SBL has been experiencing two kinds of growing pains,” said Kutsko, Richards’s successor. “One is the growing membership itself—international membership has more than doubled in the last ten years to a total of 2,600. But growth is good, especially when you see so many disciplines in the humanities experiencing decline.”

The second growth factor, said Kutsko, is the multiplying specializations in academic studies and the variety of approaches to scripture besides that of historical-critical research. The field has seen the rise of such subfields as feminist and gay perspectives, postcolonial studies, postmodernist interpretations, and studies on how the Bible is received in different cultures—evidence of an enormous “methodological variety,” he said.

The “big tent” configuration allows for many kinds of networking and collaboration, said Kutsko. The complaints raised by Hendel and the ensuing online debate within the SBL over the relation of faith and scholarship “was not only healthy as a form of communication but as an indicator of our vitality,” he said. “I was delighted to watch this conversation.” cc



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The great EB

THIS SPRING MARKS the 100th anniversary of the 11th edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, generally considered the greatest manifestation of the “Great EB.” In March 1911, a full-page ad in the *New York Times* heralded the 11th edition as “the sum of human knowledge—all that mankind has thought, done or achieved, all of the past experience of humanity that has survived the trial of time and the ordeal of service and is preserved as the useful knowledge of today” and declared that in its 29 volumes “all is included that is relevant and everything explained that is explainable.”

Such claims on the part of any reference work, whether *wiki*-based or peer-reviewed, sound extravagant today. We are humbler now, less sanguine about our powers of comprehension, more sensitive to cultural bias. Yet there remains something awe-inspiring about the Great EB and the grand synthesis it represents. If there is folly in the attempt, perhaps it is a holy folly.

The first edition, published in three volumes in 1768, was Edinburgh’s answer to the French *Encyclopédie*. The three Scots who conceived the plan—diminutive Andrew Bell, prudent Colin Macfarquhar and whisky-loving William Smellie (memorialized by Robert Burns for his “uncomb’d grizzly locks, wild staring, thatch’d / A head for thought profound and clear, unmatch’d”), and the “Society of Gentlemen” which supported their venture, were after something more Scottish in spirit than the jaded rationalism of the French *encyclopédistes*. They hoped to distill all the arts and sciences to their essentials, retaining everything that is useful and pleasing in the world of learning and compassing the practical as well as the high arts, from the mechanics of Noah’s ark to the physiology of childbirth illustrated in meticulous (to some readers, obscene) detail.

Subsequent editions enlisted the leading lights of British, Irish and eventually American learning and culture. But the 11th edition (which was updated but not significantly changed until the 14th) surpasses all. It gave T. S. Eliot a source of arcane lore at once fascinating and oppressive; in his poem “Animula,” “The pain of living and the drug of dreams / Curl up the small soul in the window seat / Behind the Encyclopaedia Britannica.” Jorge Luis Borges spent his first literary prize on a complete set of the 11th edition, and in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” wrote of an imaginary world whose existence he discovered in an altered reproduction of the tenth. Richard John Neuhaus, who used to read the 11th edition every summer with his friends in an Ottawa cottage, counted it indispensable.

We purchased our own set many years ago, and it has been moldering away in the basement—with its dark red boards, morocco leather spine and India paper leaves slowly yellowing

and gathering dust—ever since I gave up the scheme of reading it from end to end. To celebrate the centenary, our boys carried the heavy volumes back upstairs; and now I sit gazing at towers of knowledge I cannot hope to scale.

The 11th edition is the consummate expression of the heroic age of discovery and translation, of prodigies like Assyriologist Archibald Sayce and Egyptologist Flinders Petrie, of clergy naturalists, philologist missionaries, spiritualists, feminists, abolitionists, socialists, Tractarians, Darwinians, utilitarians and Theosophists. Dipping into the 11th edition at random, I encounter Algernon Swinburne discoursing on Mary Queen of Scots, Frank Podmore on automatic writing, James Clerk Maxwell on capillary action, Morris Jastrow on astrology, Baron von Hügel on the Gospel of John, T. H. Huxley on biology, James Legge on Confucius, Cuthbert Butler on Benedictines, G. G. Coulton on celibacy, John Muir on Yosemite, Reynold Nicholson on Sufism, Bertrand Russell on geometry, Jessie Weston on King Arthur, Laurence Austine Waddell on Tibet. I feel as if I’ve wandered into Socrates’s afterlife: a chance to meet the intellectual heroes of the past, a symposium with men and women of genius, strong prejudice and strange habits.

Neutral is one thing the Great EB was not. Catholics felt misrepresented; atheists suspected Jesuit influence. Later editions were zealous about avoiding giving offense; but I find the clash of opinions bracing and am content to hear F. C. Conybeare say of the Eucharist, “To the modern mind it is absurd that an image or symbol should be taken for that which is imaged,” knowing that I can turn to the articles on transubstantiation, Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception for a different point of view. At least religion is taken seriously and theology conceived as a vital branch of knowledge.

At a 1968 banquet in London’s Guildhall celebrating the 200th anniversary of the *Britannica*, Robert Hutchins raised his glass of Madeira to the mayor, prime minister and distinguished guests and toasted the *Britannica* as the embodiment of “a vision in which science and technology, instead of threatening to exterminate us, will repeal the curse of Adam and enable all men everywhere to achieve their full human possibilities.” No doubt there is hubris in thinking that by adding knowledge to knowledge we attain wisdom. Yet I find too much of the true, the good and the beautiful in these 100-year-old volumes to return them to the basement. Somehow we will find a way to make room for them where they belong, next to the *The Divine Comedy* and the OED, on the first floor.

Carol Zaleski is professor of world religions at Smith College.

IN Review

Murder at the rectory

by John G. Turner

In the summer of 1921, a Methodist minister fatally shot the most prominent Catholic priest in Birmingham, Alabama, on his rectory porch in broad daylight.

The motive was obvious. That day, Father James Coyle had performed the wedding of Edwin Stephenson's 18-year-old daughter, Ruth, to Pedro Gussman, a Catholic Puerto Rican laborer more than two decades her senior. After killing Coyle, Stephenson promptly walked from the rectory to the nearby courthouse and confessed to the crime.

Sharon Davies skillfully traces how an open-and-shut murder case unraveled. That the outcome seemed foreordained did not inhibit Davies from writing a gripping trial history.

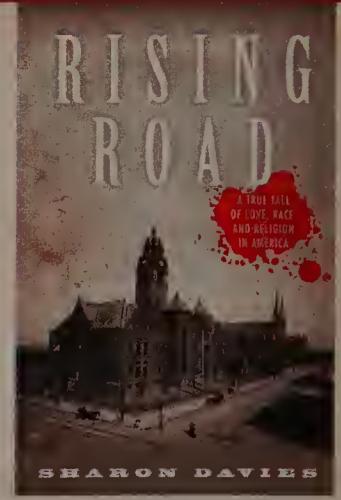
Davies makes vivid the pervasive anti-Catholicism of the early 20th-century American South. Some readers will be familiar with earlier instances of anti-Catholic violence, such as the 1834 burning of a Massachusetts convent and the 1844 Philadelphia "Bible riots." Davies demonstrates that vicious and potentially violent anti-Catholicism persisted in parts of the United States for another century. Alabama legislators passed a law in 1919 that empowered authorities to search convents without obtaining a warrant in order to make sure that Catholics were not kidnapping Protestant girls and turning them into nuns. In Birmingham, a Baptist minister who was an avowed opponent of "Romanism" declared that the Catholic Church was training a private army to "make America Catholic."

The anti-Catholicism did not go uncontested. Many Alabamans, including the governor, criticized the not-guilty verdict in the Stephenson case and wanted to dissociate their state from charges of reli-

gious bigotry. Still, Edwin Stephenson shared the anti-Catholic fears of many Alabama Protestants. He was a minister (technically, a "local deacon") of the northern Methodist Episcopal Church. Known as the "Marrying Parson," he made a living in Birmingham by soliciting business from eloping couples at the county courthouse. The anti-Catholic animus of Stephenson and his wife, Mary, were probably heightened by their home's location near Coyle's St. Paul's Church. Racial and religious bigotry were part of the air Ruth breathed as a child; one year, she decided to wear her father's Ku Klux Klan robes as a Halloween costume. Enjoying a boom in membership that peaked in the mid-1920s, the Klan targeted not only African Americans but also any other perceived threats to white Protestant nationhood.

The family's proximity to St. Paul's piqued Ruth's curiosity about the objects of her father's hatred. She occasionally slipped into the church and, over the years, became acquainted with some of its parishioners. Shortly after her 18th birthday, Ruth was baptized a Catholic. She converted despite her parents' strenuous attempts to extinguish her interest in Catholicism. According to Ruth, her father beat her, locked her in her room and considered consigning her to an insane asylum.

Perhaps to declare her autonomy from her parents, Ruth married Pedro Gussman, an occasional acquaintance, several months later. In Alabama, it was against the law for a white person to marry a "Negro or any descendent of a Negro," but there were no legal barriers to Ruth's marriage because the law regarded Gussman as white. Still, in the eyes of many "old-stock" Americans,



Rising Road: A True Tale of Love, Race, and Religion in America

By Sharon Davies

Oxford University Press, 352 pp., \$27.95

Puerto Ricans (and Mexicans, Italians and Jews) occupied an ambiguous racial middle ground.

A few hours after Father Coyle performed the ceremony, Stephenson shot him. Stephenson absurdly claimed that he had fired in self-defense after the priest had gone inside the rectory to fetch a weapon and had threatened him. Despite his apparently flimsy claims, Stephenson's lawyers served him well. The leading light of the defense team was Hugo Black, a future member of both the Klan and the Supreme Court. (Black later joined the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision overturning state bans on interracial marriage, but in 1921 he did not hesitate to raise the specter of race.) "There are twenty mulattoes for every Negro in Porto Rico," Black told the jury in his closing arguments, overtly appealing to fears of interracial marriage. It took the jury four hours to find Stephenson not guilty.

What remains unexplained and perhaps unknowable is exactly why those 12 jurors—apparently all Protestants—acquitted Stephenson. Did they all loathe Catholics? Did they regard Gussman as black? Inexplicable as it seems, did they

Reviewed by John G. Turner, who teaches modern American history at the University of South Alabama and is author of *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (University of North Carolina Press).

find Stephenson's claim that he fired in self-defense credible enough to cast reasonable doubt on the prosecution's allegations? Most likely the jurors shared the belief of much of the state's press: that men possessed an inherent right to defend their homes from unwanted foreign influences, be they racial or religious. Since the jurors kept their reflections to themselves, though, we will never know exactly why Stephenson was set free.

Rising Road provides us with lessons for our own time. Muslims in the United States today face many of the same obstacles that Catholics faced in the 20th century—ignorance of their religion, suspicion of disloyalty and violence, and fear that their growing numbers might destabilize American society. The fact that the United States mostly transcended the bigotry faced by Birmingham Catholics in the 1920s, however, provides reason for long-term optimism.

Many of us, moreover, have faced or will face a situation akin to the dilemma encountered by Edwin and Mary Stephenson. Davies writes that they wanted Ruth, their only child, "to share their loves and convictions, as well as their hates and fears." Whatever our religious beliefs and affiliation, and no matter how much we profess tolerance for our children's choices, we want and expect them to embrace our own brand of religiosity.

To an even larger extent than a century ago, the United States is a nation of religious switchers, in which adults frequently change denominations and in which a large percentage of children depart from their parents' religion. How many mainline Protestant parents have reacted with befuddlement or even disdain when their children claim to have found their salvation through evangelical ministries like Young Life and Campus Crusade? How many Protestants of any denomination could generate good will toward a new in-law if their son or daughter married a Mormon? Unless their children join or marry into a cult or organization that places them in immediate danger, a mixture of patience, curiosity and love will surely do the most for the parents' relationship with them and provide the best testimony of the parents' own beliefs. The question of religious tolerance is often most important within the family.

Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript
By Søren Kierkegaard; edited and translated by Alastair Hannay
Cambridge University Press
582 pp., \$39.99 paperback

Many of the readers who flock to Søren Kierkegaard are members of the philosophy guild. The Kierkegaard book of choice for most of these aficionados is the ironically titled *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. It is in this sprawling 500-plus-page addendum to the slim and taut *Philosophical Fragments* that the Danish Socrates tenders his critique of objectivity and makes his most tightly (though still obliquely) reasoned case that reason and knowledge can take us only so far in life—or at least in the life of the spirit.

Those attracted to Kierkegaard for his dialectical triple axels have long awaited a fresh translation of this marvel of a

book, not because the earlier Swenson/Lowrie and Hong editions are inadequate—they are not—but because this is a maddeningly complicated text with many a nettlesome sentence. For non-Danish speakers and perhaps Danes as well, it always helps to have another take, especially when that take comes from Alastair Hannay, a renowned philosopher and translator who has lived and taught in Scandinavia for decades.

As Hannay explains in his illuminating and exceptionally clear introduction, the *Postscript* was composed in 1845, during a period when (comic as it may seem) our highly neurotic, theological Mozart was contemplating retiring from the scribbling life to seek a post as pastor in a rural church. By this time the 32-year-old Kierkegaard had already authored numerous works, including *Stages on Life's Way* and *Edifying Dis-*

Reviewed by Gordon Marino, who teaches philosophy at St. Olaf College and is the curator of the Hong Kierkegaard Library.

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courses. For reasons that it would take a Freud to fathom, Kierkegaard was firmly convinced that he would not live beyond his 33rd year, so he sought to capture the entire teeming jungle of his thought between the hard covers of the *Postscript*.

In addition, there was Kierkegaard's media battle with the popular Danish rag the *Corsair*. After receiving a mildly critical review of his *Stages on Life's Way*, the always umbrageous Kierkegaard reacted with a personal attack on the reviewer and the journal. The *Corsair* responded in kind, and so began a series of literary strikes and counterstrikes that went on for months. While this public battle took an immense toll on Kierkegaard, it also helped to convince him to relinquish the fantasy of packing away his desk; thus the *Postscript*, published in February 1846, was by no means concluding. *Works of Love*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Practice in Christianity* and a number of religious discourses were all post-*Postscript*.

Part and parcel of Kierkegaard's theory and practice of communication was his habit of composing his classic texts under pseudonyms. Both the *Fragments* (or *Crumbs*, as Hannay prefers) and the *Postscript* were written under the nom de plume Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's philosophical persona. It is easy to see the philosophical muscle rippling through this sometimes downright hilarious study.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, the prelude to the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard's authorial alter ego asks, "Can there be a historical point of departure for an eternal consciousness; how can such a thing be of more than historical interest; can one base an eternal consciousness on historical knowledge?" In the *Postscript* itself, Kierkegaard takes up the problem in its historical garb—as in, can Christianity provide a basis for an eternal consciousness? After all, it is Christianity alone that founds individual salvation on a historical event.

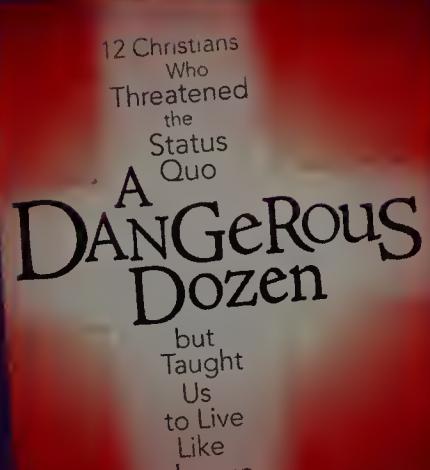
There are myriad important themes

threading through this meditation on what it means to be a Christian. Kierkegaard addresses the relation between faith and reason, the ethico-religious significance of humor and irony, the relation between mood and thought, the proper mode of communication for existentially significant truths, the importance of passion, the different levels of religiosity and so on. But the pages that are always dog-eared are those tracing out the distinction Kierkegaard deftly draws between objective and subjective thinking, and the connection he works out between developing faith and nurturing subjectivity.

Just listen to this salvo that opens part two:

While objective thought is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker is, as existing, essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has a different kind of reflection, namely the reflec-

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tion of inwardness, of possession, by virtue of which it belongs to the subject and no other.

A few pages earlier came a shot across the bow for all who seek to turn science and faith into bedfellows:

The more objective the world and subjectivities become, the more difficult it is with religious categories, just because they belong within subjectivity, which is why wanting to be . . . scientific, objective in relation to the religious is well-nigh an excess of irreligion.

Read: if faith were a matter of knowledge—of science—we would not need faith.

In a brace of sentences that have perhaps been parsed more than any others from the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard writes:

If someone living in the midst of Christianity enters the house of God, the house of the true God, knowing

the true conception of God, and now prays untruly, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol—where then is there more truth? The one prays truly to God though he worships an idol; the other prays untruly to the true God, and therefore worships an idol.

The message is, I think, plain: there is more truth in the inward and passionate individual who prays truly.

According to the less than objective offering that is the *Postscript*, the objectivity often associated with fairness and the triumph of reason is a form of disinterestedness that is appropriate in some areas, but not when it comes to matters of essential truth—of faith and morals. Subjectivity is a kind of unselfish self-concern, and to the extent that the modern age encourages us to suppress that inner relation, it invites spiritual suicide.



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In this philosophical and theological cornucopia of a book, Kierkegaard's *Climacus* remarks that he picked up his pen with the odd intention of making life more difficult for his readers. Perhaps by this he meant that he aimed to provide a

corrective to his times and portray the ethical and religious life in all its radical austerity. With the publication of this volume, Hannay has certainly made it easier for Kierkegaard to make our lives more difficult.



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**Part-Time Pastor,
Full-Time Church**
By Robert LaRochelle
Pilgrim, 160 pp., \$14.00 paperback

A majority of congregations in the United States average fewer than 100 in attendance. While some congregations manage to employ a full-time minister with the requisite M.Div. and standing in their denomination, many others can't afford this desirable arrangement. And many congregations that currently have a full-time pastor sense that the time is coming when they'll have to downsize their expectations for full-time pastoral leadership. This is especially disconcerting for mainline Protestantism, which prizes an educated ministry. Many congregations wonder if they can continue to be a vital full-time church if all they can afford is a part-time pastor.

Robert LaRochelle's *Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church* is an answer to the prayers of all those concerned about the future of the small church, whether they're denominational officials charged with helping congregations find pastors, local church leaders looking for ways to provide effective leadership or seminaries needing to offer appropriate educational opportunities for clergy called to bivocational ministry. In addition, this book is a gift to clergy considering such a call.

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LaRochelle is a current practitioner of what he preaches—he serves as a bivocational pastor of a small United Church of Christ congregation while working full-time as a high school guidance counselor. Beyond this experience, LaRochelle draws upon the years he spent as an ordained deacon in the Roman Catholic Church. This earlier role provided him with important insights about training and about how pastors can fulfill expectations of congregations when they are also employed outside the church.

The book's premise is that congregations without a full-time pastor can be fully functioning and vital if they're willing to think creatively and plan carefully. The decreasing number of people dropping in to visit the pastor during business hours and the new technologies that allow pastors to keep in touch with members and staff without being in the office make it possible for someone to serve part-time and still give appropriate attention to the needs of the congregation.

There are trade-offs to consider—for example, part-time pastors may lack flexibility in their schedules and be less available for ecumenical and denominational meetings. But if congregations and clergy are creative and discerning, a part-time pastor can provide effective ministry so the congregation can continue to be a vital force in the community. Having served as a part-time pastor of a vibrant small congregation that was served for much of its existence by an ordained minister who was also working as a high school math teacher, I found LaRochelle's analysis to be on target.

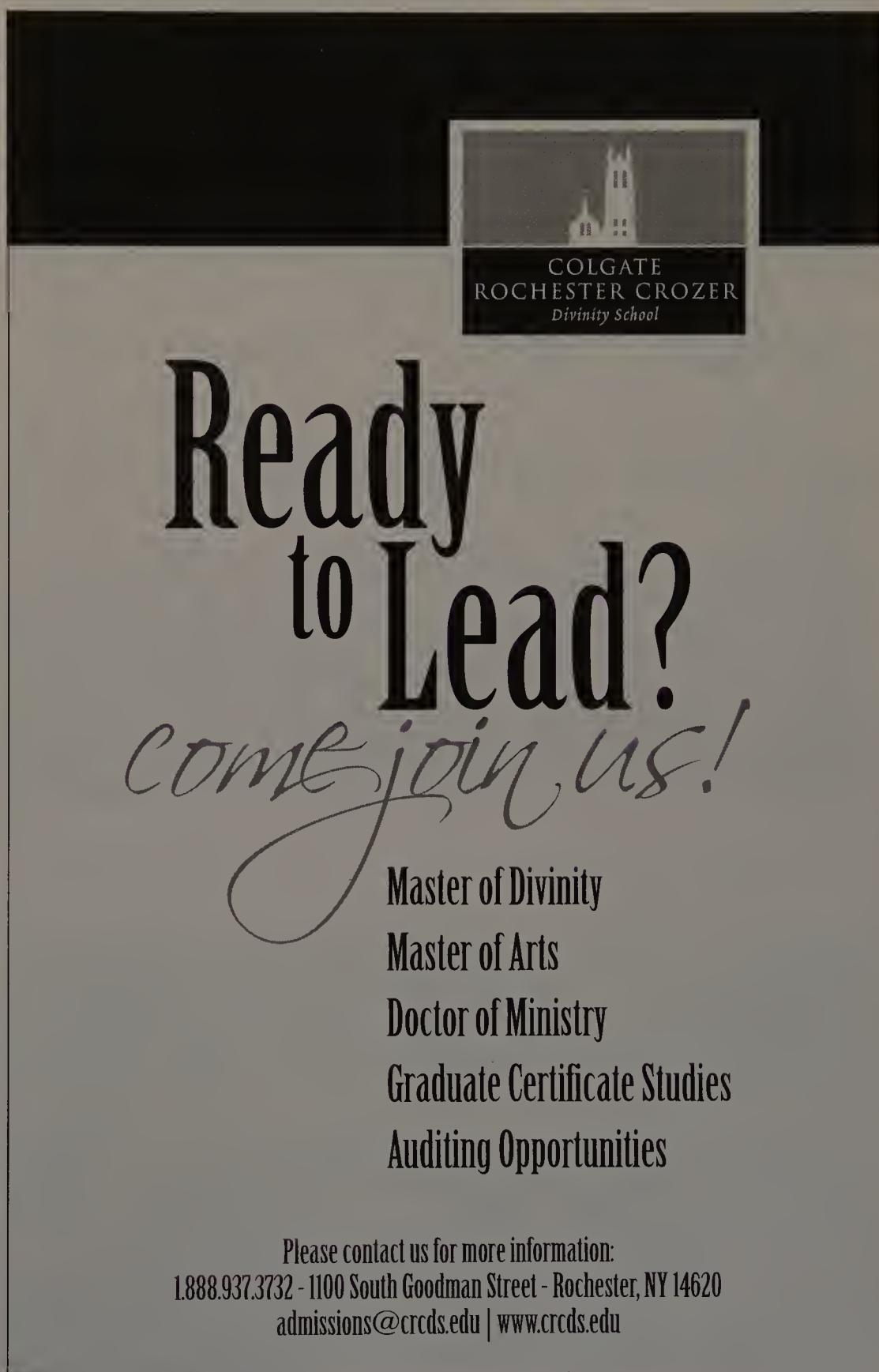
Small churches have always found ways of making do, but too often their solutions lead to diminishment of the congregation's ministry. If they take the shortcut of hiring whoever comes cheapest, the church can suffer mightily. Many of these congregations either drift away from their denomination or cease to exist. Therefore, whatever steps are deemed necessary to provide pastoral leadership for congregations, "the mainstream church must never

back away from its responsibility to train theologically literate and pastorally skilled clergymen and clergywomen."

Churches need to take time to carefully discern who they are and what they require in a pastor, and prospective ministers need to have the right mixture of gifts and abilities that match the needs of a particular congregation. Two skill sets that LaRochelle considers to be especially important for a bivocational pastor are

conflict management and executive management. With regard to the latter, even traditions that highly value the priesthood of all believers need to recognize that if the pastor does not have strong leadership abilities, the church will become rudderless and moribund.

Pastoral leadership is just one side of the coin, as these congregations will have to take on responsibilities that are often reserved for clergy—such as visiting the



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Reviewed by Robert Cornwall, pastor of Central Woodward Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Troy, Michigan, and editor of *Sharing the Practice*, the official journal of the Academy of Parish Clergy.



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homebound and the hospitalized. Congregations will have to take a close look at their structures to make sure that they are flexible enough for them to work effectively with the pastor. Finally, congregations must decide what they value most in a pastor: good preaching and worship leadership, ability to advise and counsel members, effectiveness in supervising other staff members, or other qualities.

This book provides both needed analysis and concrete, practical guidance for local congregations and clergy. LaRochelle draws on his own experience to provide questions for congregations to use in assessing their own situation, including their readiness to move toward having a bivocational pastor. There are also guidelines for search committees, which, LaRochelle notes, must be very upfront about their expectations of a bivocational pastor. This is especially important for churches moving from full-time to part-time leadership.

We need effective part-time leaders because, LaRochelle reminds readers, "the mainstream church of the future" needs congregations that are "small, progressive, and alive."

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Chosen Ones (The Aedyn Chronicles)

By Alister McGrath
Zondervan, 208 pp., \$14.99

Flight of the Outcasts (The Aedyn Chronicles)

By Alister McGrath
Zondervan, 176 pp., \$14.99

Alister McGrath, one of modern Christianity's foremost theological voices, is writing children's books. The Aedyn Chronicles are a series in which two British siblings, Peter and Julia, are magically transported to the land of Aedyn, once a paradise, where it is their destiny to set things right.

For obvious reasons, no one gets very far into a discussion of the Aedyn series without mentioning the Chronicles of Narnia, by C. S. Lewis. In both series, a set of siblings living away from their parents journey to another world. In both series, the oldest of those siblings is named Peter. Both Aedyn and Narnia are in the throes of an ideological civil war, and the children's arrival is the fulfillment of a prophecy. And (Lewis and McGrath being eminent theologians) both series are examples of Christian allegory.

Children's allegorical fantasy has long been a favored medium for theologians. George MacDonald, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and Madeleine L'Engle wrote the founding classics of the genre and remained its best-selling authors for decades. Then in 1995 Philip Pullman published *Northern Lights* (called *The Golden Compass* in North America), the first book of His Dark Materials, a trilogy that can be viewed as Narnia for atheists. His young heroes, Lyra and Will (British schoolchildren, yes; siblings, no), enter into another world's ideological struggle, fulfilling a prophecy, and in the end defeat God, thereby ridding the world of theism.

Pullman was not the first author to write a children's book without a Christian theme, but his trilogy's worldwide

success has made it the most notable antithesis to Narnia and Middle-earth. And while he purports that its message is antiestablishment rather than antireligion, one can't help noticing that the establishment he brings down is the Christian church.

McGrath has never said that the Aedyn Chronicles are meant to strike back at Pullman's trilogy, but I can't help

sensing a protective tendency in this venture. Perhaps it's nostalgic of me to assume that McGrath wants to uphold the tradition of Lewis and Tolkien, to make sure that Christian allegory maintains its position in the face of His Dark Materials and Harry Potter; on the other hand, he doesn't go out of his way to avoid the comparison. Either the Aedyn Chronicles are an homage to the



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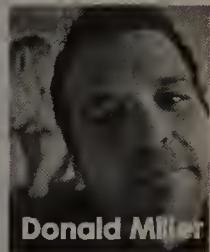
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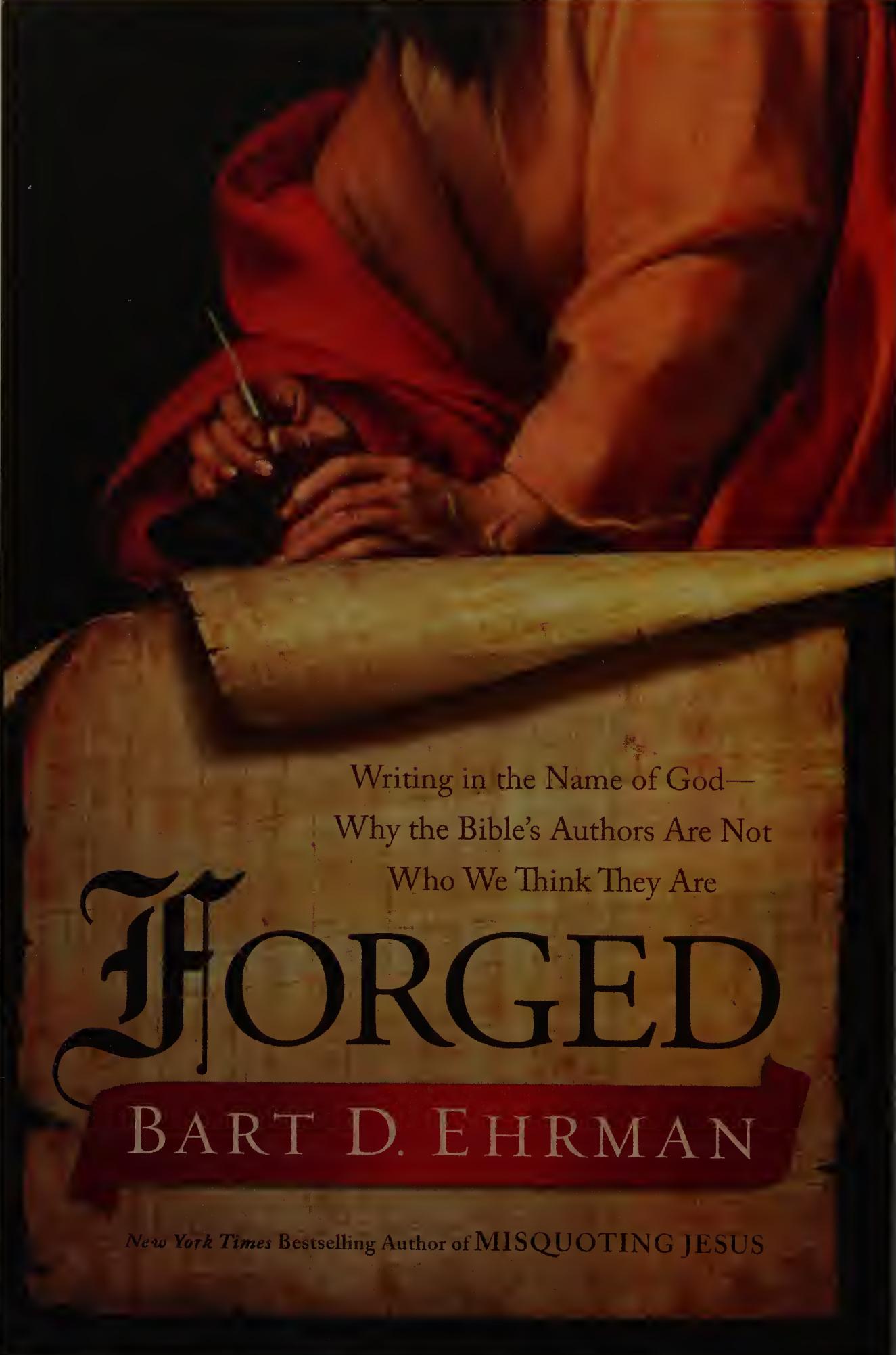
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Reviewed by Janet Potter, CENTURY editorial assistant.



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Chronicles of Narnia, or McGrath was born under a rock.

McGrath's intended reader is between eight and 12 years of age and won't mind that the story seems cobbled together from the best bits of its predecessors. Narnia parallels aside, McGrath's Aedyn Chronicles are a

well-plotted confrontation between faith and reason.

In *Chosen Ones*, the first book of the series, Aedyn is populated by the Khemians, a people whose leaders have abandoned the historic faith in the Lord of Hosts. When the children arrive, Julia joins forces with the insurgent believers,



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who are planning a rebellion. Peter, a budding engineer—who says things like “We’re nothing but lots and lots of atoms, and that’s all there is to it. There’s no enchantment”—tries to curry favor with Aedyn’s leaders by teaching them how to make gunpowder. Although the conflict between the leaders and the rebels eventually takes place, the main question in the story is whether Peter will admit that he’s wrong and join his sister.

In the second book, *Flight of the Outcasts*, Peter and Julia return to Aedyn with their snotty stepsister Louisa, who is accidentally transported with them (quite like Eustace in Lewis’s *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*). They find that the Khemians have been enslaved. Although again convinced that they are destined to help, the children become enslaved themselves. In the midst of this much gloomier volume, McGrath starts to think and write on a grander scale.

Chosen Ones is tightly structured and ideologically transparent but lacks the sense of yearning and perseverance that

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draws readers into Lewis and Tolkien. In *Flight of the Outcasts* McGrath sets up a longer, deeper struggle for the fate of Aedyn. Peter and Julia, rather than bickering about the value of science, begin to question issues of motivation and purpose, and it deepens their faith. When Julia tells Alice, her Khemian friend, that she doubts her ability to be useful, Alice replies, "In the midst of the darkness you cannot

understand how the Lord of Hosts is using you."

Theologians do not necessarily make good children's novelists. It's a valuable, enriching happenstance when they do. If McGrath continues this development of his mythology, making theology feel more intrinsic to the narrative than grafted on, the Aedyn Chronicles have the potential to be a significant work of allegory.

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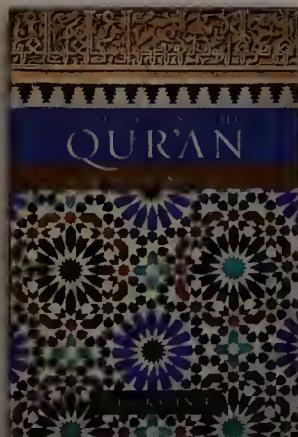
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Another Year
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 and Lesley Manville

Mike Leigh's affecting *Another Year* takes the form of a series of encounters between a contented middle-aged couple and the friends and relatives who interrupt their lives over the course of four seasons. Gerri (Ruth Sheen), a counselor, and Tom (Jim Broadbent), a geologist, are the still center around which other, mostly deeply unsettled lives orbit.

In the summer, they receive a visit from Tom's pal Ken (Peter Wight), whose constant drinking and gluttony are desperate attempts to compensate for a life lacking emotional engagement. Ken feels that life has passed him by, and he resents the young who are still in the thick of it. Gerri and Tom's lonesome son Joe (Oliver Maltman) is a source of some concern until, in the autumn, he introduces them to his new girlfriend Katie (Karina Fernandez). In the winter, they attend Tom's sister-in-law's funeral and persuade his brother Ronnie (David Bradley), broken and confused by the loss of his wife, to stay with them for a while.

Cycling in and out of Tom and Gerri's domestic life is Mary (Lesley Manville), a secretary who works with Gerri—and an alcoholic who exists on the cusp of disaster. Self-delusional and self-pitying, Mary dwells on the failed relationships of her youth yet presents herself as the continual object of unwanted male attention. At a summer barbecue she flirts with Joe, who gently deflects her advances. Later, when she comes over for tea the day he brings Katie over to meet his folks, Mary can't conceal her rage at this woman who's had the audacity to take hold of a man Mary covets but



BITTERSWEET: Gerri (Ruth Sheen) and Tom (Jim Broadbent) portray a well-adjusted couple who have a number of maladjusted friends.

who has never shown the least romantic interest in her. Manville's performance is one of the most harrowing and moving depictions of lonely hearts desperation the movies have given us. Watching it, you veer between embarrassment and pity.

The movie is pared down but surpassingly elegant, like a superbly assembled piece of chamber music (Gary Yershon's score is lovely, as is Dick Pope's cinematography). But it has an unusual flaw. Because Gerri and Tom are positioned as the happy, stable couple who host and advise their messed-up friends, after a while Gerri in particular begins to seem a little smug. Sheen is an amazing camera subject, her long face graced with magnificent cheekbones and framed with tendrils that drip down from her ponytail—she looks like a British Modigliani. She's also a terrific actress. But the role doesn't serve her well. By the time Mary asks Gerri if she's angry at her, and Gerri replies that she isn't angry but just let down, she seems high-handed. Yet it's clear that Leigh doesn't intend us to see her that way—not the kind of mistake he generally makes.

But Manville's exciting performance makes *Another Year* more than worth

seeing. Others contribute unforgettable scenes as well. Imelda Staunton shows up early on as an insomniac with shredded nerves whose doctor passes her on to Gerri, and though she's on screen for less than ten minutes, she provides a brilliant portrait of a woman so depressed that she can't even handle discussing what's wrong with her life. (When Gerri asks her what she thinks might improve it, her client answers, "A new life.") And when Ronnie's son Carl (Martin Savage, who plays Watson on the current British TV series *Sherlock*) arrives late for his mother's funeral, the furious exchange between father and son has the jagged edge of a scene from a Harold Pinter play, though with a humanity you won't find in Pinter.

Later Mary wanders by Gerri and Tom's, in rough shape after a champagne binge, and finds Ronnie there alone. He rolls a cigarette for her, and for a moment these two anchorless people reach across the void to each other in a suggestion of what Tennessee Williams called "broken gates between people." At his best, Leigh is a marvel.

Reviewed by Steve Vineberg, who teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.

by Rodney Clapp

The train I ride," Elvis sang, "is 16 coaches long." The train I ride, at least a dozen times a year, stretches four or five coaches long. It is Amtrak's Pere Marquette line between Chicago and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Travelers on the line are businesspeople, shoppers, baseball fans, family visitors, college students and—without fail—a goodly portion of Amish. Passengers nearly always fill the Pere Marquette, but, despite that, the line teeters annually in peril of elimination.

Americans are shortsighted about nothing so much as passenger trains. Sooner or later, and usually sooner, conversations about passenger trains and Amtrak in particular sputter with the dirty "s-word": subsidies. For some, that word alone is a conversation-stopper. It is taken as self-evident that government subsidies should be eliminated, and Amtrak is a favorite target.

Such conversations forget (or intentionally neglect) the reality that all American means of transportation depend on "subsidies." Eisenhower's construction of the interstate highway system was one of the most monumental—and expensive—public works projects in history. Concrete and asphalt roadways require much more frequent and more costly maintenance than other forms of transportation. Such "user-fees" as gasoline taxes are far from covering all these costs,

and tax dollars make up the difference. Though it is comparatively inefficient and disproportionately polluting, America massively subsidizes automobile transportation.

Even walking, that most basic and independent means of transportation, depends on "subsidies" such as sidewalks, street crossings and park trails. And who really believes that nationwide air travel would be safer and more efficient without government coordination and regulation of air traffic control?

Admittedly, Amtrak makes an easy target. It is, as theologian Stephen Long has remarked, a creature of "state-sponsored monopoly capitalism," representing the worst of both the capitalist and the socialist worlds. Underfunded from its beginnings in the 1970s, it is a ramshackle affair of old equipment and heavy borrowing of lines built for and still favoring freight trains.

These encumbrances are largely responsible for the delays and even stoppages Amtrak riders endure. In one particularly infamous episode on the Pere Marquette, passengers delayed for an entire workday fled across snow-covered fields to meet friends and relatives who had received desperate cell-phone calls and waited along a nearby highway.

Think of a factory in which all machinery is owned, built

The train I ride

and maintained by someone other than the business operating it and you begin to get a picture of the challenge Amtrak faces. Or, to take a transportation metaphor, imagine the interstate road system if it were composed by stitching together state highways, county roads in various states of repair and gravel country roads.

Despite these handicaps, Amtrak still largely manages to embody the advantages of rail travel. Airline transportation is unsuitable for distances fewer than 400 miles and has, with its regular delays and cripplingly tight seating, become an outright ordeal. Railroad seating is spacious and comfortable, and trains include lavatories in which you can actually stand up. Train travel allows, at all times during the trip, walking about the coaches and visiting a dining car that features not exactly gourmet cuisine, but still a variety of beverages and hot food at reasonable prices. When riding a train, unlike driving a car, you can comfortably and safely work, sleep, read, daydream or pray. (There may be plenty of prayer on airplanes, but it is for survival or sheer endurance.)

Then there is what might be called the romance factor. Trains pass by prairies, mountainsides, sun-dappled lakes

and woodland streams. Neither isolated, as in an automobile, nor painfully crammed together, as on a plane, train passengers enjoy the opportunity for relaxing conversation with strangers or friends. The multifarious romance of trains is proved in the vast corpus of American train songs that honor working people, imagine an escape to wider or better places and anticipate the arrival of lovers borne back home. By comparison, the canon of American plane songs is paltry, and the songs are usually desolate in mood (consider "Leavin' on a Jet Plane," "In the Early Morning Rain," "Silver Wings") and often about beastly machines taking a loved one away. "Roaring engines, fading somewhere out of sight . . . taking you away, leaving me lonely."

As the country's population grows, roadways will become even more crowded. As the amount of oil in the earth disappears, gasoline prices will rise to unaffordable heights. The ecological costs of travel by automobile will continue to grow. Eventually, we will reach a tipping point: passenger train travel will make sense to most Americans. We can only hope that by then some semblance of Amtrak will remain to save us from the expense and grief of starting from scratch. Until then, even a slow train is better than no train at all.

Rodney Clapp's Soundings column appears in every other issue.

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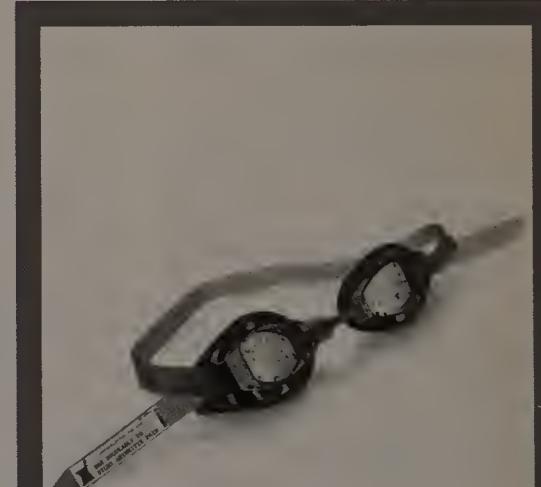
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Brooklyn Angels, by Laura James

The Bible readings at the beginning of Lent say that after Jesus passed through the temptations in the wilderness, angels came to tend him. In our time we might dismiss the idea of heavenly messengers as naive or purely metaphorical. But Laura James offers matter-of-fact paintings of angels. The artist recalls that as a girl she would read while sitting on the roof of her family's brownstone in New York. She imagined that angels were with her in that secluded place. The Judeo-Christian story is well populated with angelic presence—they are messengers, challengers and comforters. We are not alone.

—Lois Huey-Heck

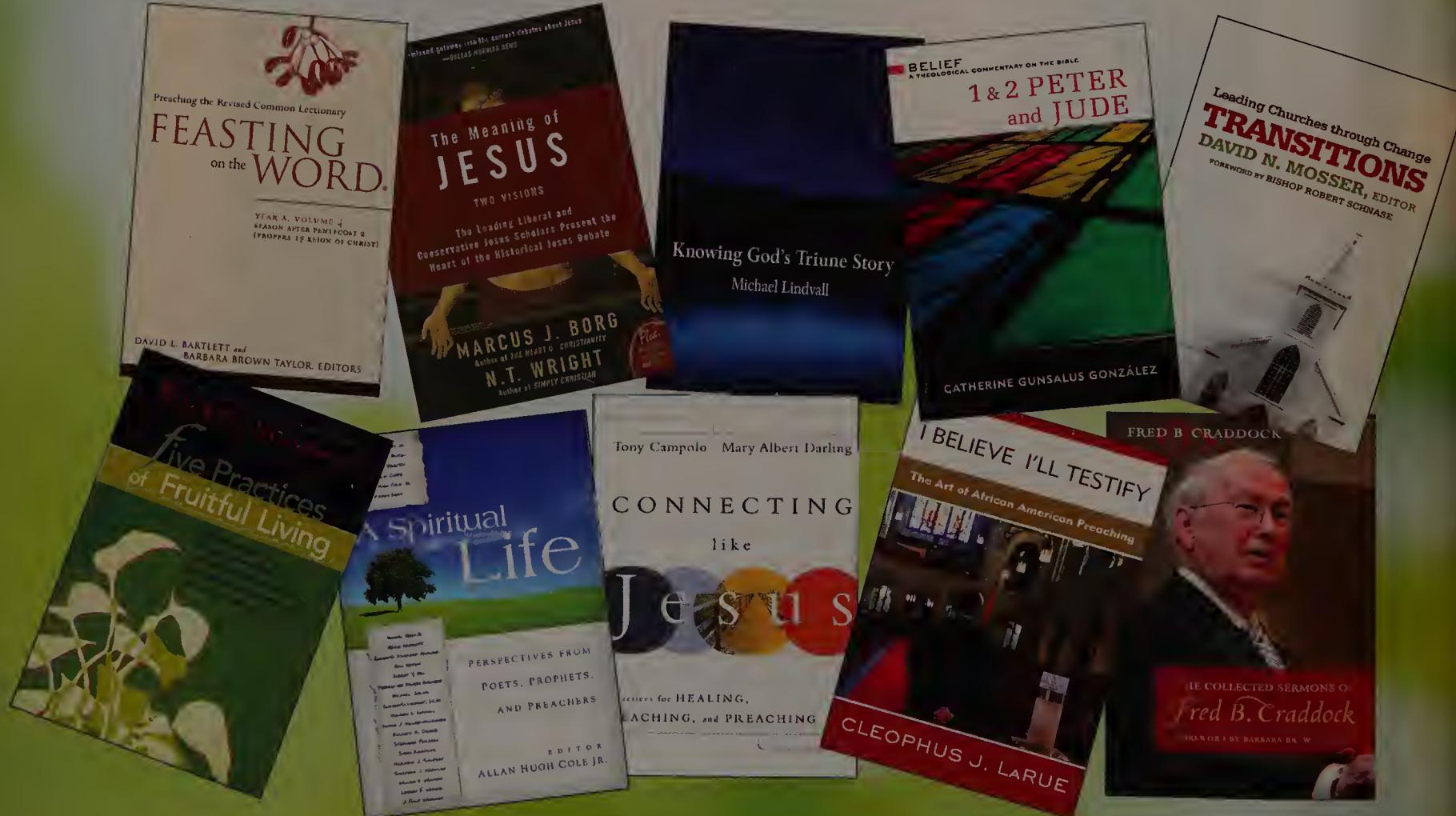
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